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MAGAZINE



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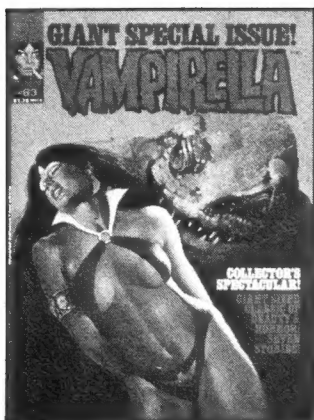
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VAMPIRELLA No. 63. PUBLISHED MONTHLY EXCEPT FEBRUARY, JUNE AND NOVEMBER BY WARREN PUBLISHING CO. EDITORIAL, SUBSCRIPTION & BUSINESS OFFICES AT 145 EAST 32nd STREET, N.Y. 10016. TELEPHONE: (212) 683-6050.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: 9 ISSUES FOR \$12.00 IN THE U.S.; CANADA AND ELSEWHERE \$14.00.

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VAMPIRELLA

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16 BRANCATELLI: COMIC BOOKS
J.B. does not cover strips in his column... note the title. If he did cover comic strips he would not report on the boring NCS any more than we would mention it on this page.

17 JENIFER The hunter paused in the woods to view the terrible spectacle. A woodsman was about to lob off the head of a young girl. He saved her. He had to, but what compelled him to take her home? And that face!

28 GROUND ROUND The old lady had it coming to her for years. It was about time the meek little butcher gathered his courage and did her in. Now, where to hide her fat body. The meat freezer! And then...

35 AS YE SOW It ain't the same no more... like before the plague. The Dark Hunger had swept the land, turnin' the "Livins" to "Deads" and the "Deads" a-gin the "Livins." Me? I'm a "Dead," at least, I think I am.

45 GLASTONBURY TOR He had come to the Abbey to discover the truth of the weird legend. In its dark, dusty corners he found the maiden who was life, but with her were ten hermits. Each was a form of Death!

53 THE PROFESSIONAL Peter Grant was a professional who brought his services door to door to lonely housewives. Gladly, they paid him to deliver what their husbands could or would not. But Grant was greedy!

62 WINGS OF VENGEANCE Birds are sensitive creatures and they alone listened to the young man's tale. He told of love, betrayal, mutilation, death and finally banishment. Birds finished the story!

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VAMPIRELLA

WHAT WE HAVE, NOW, IN OUR NOSTRILS, IS THE SCENT OF MUSK AND JASMINE, THE HEADY AROMA OF THE SECRET SERAGLIOS THAT LIE BEHIND THE CONCEALING JALOUSIES, THE CLEAN ARIDITY OF THE ETERNAL DESERT WASTES. THE RICH STINK OF DOLLAR-EARNING OIL.

WE ARE IN THE LAND THAT HAS NOT FORGOTTEN THE FABULOUS GREATNESS OF *HAROUN AL-RASHID*, NOR THE TALES THAT *SHEHEREZADE* TOLD TO BEGUILF THE VENGEFUL KING *SHAHRYAR* WHEN THE WORLD WAS YOUNG...

FOR THIS IS THE LAND OF *THE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS*, SOMETIMES KNOWN AS *LES MILLE ET UNE NUITS*, *ALF LAYLA WA LAYLA*, OR *HAZA AFSANA*. THE OLDEST AND MOST IMPERISHABLE LEGEND OF THE *EAST*...

TO THIS PLACE...TO ROMANTIC *ASHIB*, COME *VAMPIRELLA* AND HER COMPANION *PENDRAGON*.

THEY COME IN A PRIVATE 707 OF THE SULTAN'S FLEET, AND ARE GREETED BY A GUARD-OF-HONOUR OF BLOODED DESERT WARRIORS.

THEY COME FOR A CONFRONTATION.

A CONFRONTATION BETWEEN...

Vampirella and the Sultana's Revenge!

WELL, WHAT A LOVELY WELCOME! I FEEL LIKE A STAR!

YOU ARE A STAR, VAMPI, MY DEAR...AND PLAYING THE PALACE!



THE **SULTANA OF ASHIB** HAS JUST FINISHED HER BATH. ASHIB... THE SOVEREIGN STATE OF SOUTHWEST ARABIA, WITH AN ANNUAL OIL INCOME PER CAPITA, OF \$570,000 (WHICH MAKES EVERY CITIZEN A **MILLIONAIRE** EVERY TWO YEARS... GIVE OR TAKE A FEW DOLLARS.)

I AM **FLAWLESS...**
QUITE **FLAWLESS!**

AS ALWAYS AFTER HER BATH, THE SULTANA EXHIBITS HER BLONDE, **CAUCASIAN CHARMS** TO HERSELF IN THE MULTI-MIRRORED WALLS OF HER BOUDOIR. THE SULTANA'S FAVOURITE VIEW IS... **HERSELF.**

YES, MAJESTY. THE VERY DIADEM OF ASHIB FADES BEFORE YOUR MAGNIFICENCE!

COGNOSCENTE OF THE **DRAKULONNE SAGA** WILL HAVE DETECTED, IN THE FEATURES OF THE SULTANA, A STARTLING RESEMBLANCE TO **DROGA**, FORMER MISTRESS OF THE LATE, UNLAMENTED JABEZ KRUGER.*

SHALL I SEND **ACHMED** TO YOUR MAJESTY, NOW THAT THE BOWL OF NIGHT HAS DESCENDED?

NO! **ACHMED** BEGINS TO BORE ME. LAST NIGHT, FOR THE SPACE OF THREE BREATHS, THE ECSTASY PALLED..!

SEND **ALI!**

* VAMPIRELLA #32

AND WHAT OF **ACHMED**, MAJESTY?

FOOL! DO I HAVE TO DO ALL THE THINKING AROUND HERE? YOU KNOW THE PROCEDURE...

HAVE HIM THROWN INTO THE CRYPT!

ACHMED IS THE SON OF A POOR FISHERMAN WHOSE PROWESS AS A LOVER HAS RAISED HIM TO THE DIZZY HEIGHTS OF **CHAMBERLAIN EXTRAORDINARY** TO HER SERENE MAJESTY THE SULTANA. HE IS NOW ABOUT TO DESCEND TO THE **DEPTHS!**

THERE MUST BE SOME MISTAKE! THE SULTANA...

NO MISTAKE, EXCELLENCY...

WE HAVE OUR ORDERS, EXCELLENCY!

EEEEEEEEAAA-A-A-AGGH!

A PAUSE... A SCREAM... AND SOMETHING **THUNKS...** BACK AT THE GUARDS' FEET.

ALWAYS HAPPENS!

HEADS HE CAN TAKE OR LEAVE... GASTRONOMICALLY SPEAKING!

THE GREAT PENDRAGON, ILLUSIONIST EXTRAORDINARY, AND HIS DELICIOUS ASSISTANT, ARE ESCORTED TO A SUITE OF ROOMS ADJOINING THE PALACE.



MMMMM.' IT'S ME FOR A SWIM!

SWIM BY ALL MEANS, MY DEAR. AN EXCELLENT ALL-ROUND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY. I SHALL BE WITH YOU IN... **SPIRIT!**



WHY WERE WE SENT ALL THIS WAY... TO PLAY A ONE-NIGHT GIG?

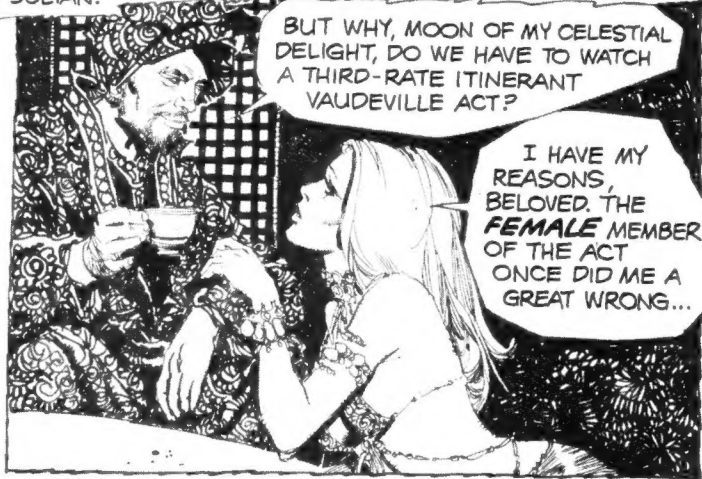
BECAUSE THE SULTAN WILLED IT..!

TO BE MORE PRECISE...OR SO I UNDERSTAND... IT WAS THE WILL OF THE **SULTANA!** IT WAS SHE WHO REQUESTED TO SEE OUR LITTLE ACT, BECAUSE OF OUR EXCELLENCE!



SPEAKING OF EXCELLENCE...THIS IS A MOST ADMIRABLE **DISTILLATION** OF THE NOBLE MALT!

MEANWHILE, IN THE THRONE ROOM OF THE PALACE, THE SULTANA IS BEGUILING AWAY THE TWILIGHT HOUR BY TAKING MINT TEA WITH HER LORD AND MASTER, THE SULTAN.



BUT WHY, MOON OF MY CELESTIAL DELIGHT, DO WE HAVE TO WATCH A THIRD-RATE ITINERANT VAUDEVILLE ACT?

I HAVE MY REASONS, BELOVED. THE **FEMALE** MEMBER OF THE ACT ONCE DID ME A GREAT WRONG...

I WOULD LIKE TO REND HER APART WITH MY FINGERNAILS... TEAR HER FLESH FROM HER BONES WITH MY OWN TEETH!



BUT I WILL CONTENT MYSELF BY CONDEMNING HER TO... **HIM IN THE CRYPT!**

THE SULTAN MOULAY AZABAH, LORD OF LIFE-AND-DEATH OVER ASHIB, BELOVED OF THE ENLIGHTENED, SERENE KEEPER OF THE SERPENT'S PLUME, DESIRED OF THE MILLION SACRED VIRGINS, IS BY NO MEANS AS STUPID AS HIS EASY, GENIAL MANNER SUGGESTS.

THIS GREAT WRONG...IT CONCERNS **A MAN**, I HAVE NO DOUBT, O'FLOWER OF CHASTITY?

NO!
NO!





O' JASMINE-BREATH, IF YOU WERE EVER TO DECEIVE ME WITH A MAN, YOU WOULD JOIN YOUR ERSTWHILE ENEMY IN THE **CRYPT!**

OH, NO, MY LORD...YOU FORGET THE TERMS OF OUR MARRIAGE SETTLEMENT!

NO MATTER WHAT MY FAULTS, NO MATTER WHAT I DO TO OFFEND YOU, YOU **WILL NEVER HARM SO MUCH AS A HAIR OF MY HEAD! REMEMBER?**

TOUCHÉ, MY RADIANT BLOSSOM.

I WILL SEE YOU AT SUPPER...AND THE ENTERTAINMENT. TILL THEN, O' PEARL OF THE ORIENT.

DROGA DOES NOT PERMIT HERSELF TO BE LACKING IN MASCULINE ATTENTIONS FOR MORE THAN A FEW MOMENTS AT ANY GIVEN TIME.

TONIGHT, MY BELOVED?

TONIGHT!

TONIGHT, WHEN THE ACCURSED **VAMPIRELLA** IS BEING RENT AND DEVoured BY **HIM IN THE CRYPT**, MY PASSIONS WILL RISE LIKE A CLUSTER OF SHOOTING STARS AND DAZZLE THE HIGHEST VAULTS OF THE FIRMAMENT!

COME AROUND ABOUT NINE, HONEY!

ALI, PET... KISS ME!



LATER...SUPPER OVER...THE NIGHTLY ENTERTAINMENT BEGINS IN THE PALACE. THE OLD STUFF... **DANCING GIRLS...**



THE USUAL SNAKE-CHARMING ACT IS ENLIVENED, ONLY, BY THE **CHARMER** GETTING HIMSELF FATALLY **BITTEN**.

EEEEAAAA...
HAAA...

ENCORE!
ENCORE!



AND THEN... **THE GREAT PENDRAGON!**

YOUR MAJESTIES,
ROYAL HIGHNESSES, FOLKS...
MY LITTLE ACT, THE ONE YOU
WILL SEE TONIGHT, IS
VESTIGIAL ALMOST
TO THE POINT OF
EXTINCTION. THE
WONDER IS THAT
I'M ABLE TO
PAY MY TAILOR'S
BILLS... LET
ALONE MY
LIQUOR
STORE...!



HOWEVER, SINCE I'M THE **ONLY** GUY
IN SHOWBIZ WHO CAN MAKE A LADY DISAPPEAR,
WITHOUT RECOURSE TO SUCH **VULGARITIES**
AS **TRAPDOORS** AND **SLIDING PANELS**...
AND MAKE HER REAPPEAR AS A **VAMPIRE**
BAT... I GUESS I'M IN BUSINESS, WITH
MY LITTLE ACT, FOR LIFE!

FOLKS!
MEET THE LITTLE
LADY **VAMPIRELLA!**
AND GIVE HER A BIG
HAND!



THE DISAPPEARANCE GOES WELL... LIKEWISE THE
REMATIALIZATION AS A VAMPIRE BAT.

HAVE A LITTLE FLUTTER AROUND,
MY DEAR... JUST SO THE FOLKS CAN SEE
THERE ARE NO HIDDEN WIRES... NO
DECEPTION.



VAMPIRELLA FLUTTERS TOO CLOSE TO
DROGA FOR THE SULTANA'S COMFORT!

EEEEEEKKKK!
IT TOUCHED ME WITH ITS
HORRIBLE LEATHERY
WINGS!



VAMPIRE RETURNS
TO PENDRAGON...

THE SULTANA...
SHE'S
KRUGER'S GIRL...
DROGA!

THE BEAUTIFUL DRACULONNE MAKES
A QUICK RE-METAMORPHOSIS.

COME, MY
DEAR...THE TIME
HAS COME TO
QUIT THESE
PARTICULAR
BOARDS! A
DEADLY CALM
HAS FALLEN
OVER OUR
AUDIENCE!

DU-DROGA?
DID YOU SU-SAY
DROGA?



IN MY EXPERIENCE,
THIS USUALLY PRESAGES
A DEMAND FOR THE
RETURN OF ADMISSION
MONEY!



OH!

THEY ARE DRAGGED BACK AND THRUST BEFORE
THE SULTAN MOULAY AZABAH.

FIRSTLY, AS TO YOUR ACT...**EXCELLENT!**
IF YOU HAD LIVED, YOU WOULD GO FAR...!

HOWEVER, IT IS THE PLEASURE
OF THAT PEARL OF PERFECTION,
MY CONSORT, THAT
YOU BE THROWN
TO **HIM IN THE
CRYPT!**



VAMPIRELLA'S AND THE SULTANA'S EYES LOCK IN MUTUAL
HATRED. PENDRAGON FINDS HIS VOICE.

HIM
IN THE
CRYPT?
WHO'S
HE,
SUH?

I AM GLAD YOU
ASKED, MY FRIEND.
IT IS A TALE THAT I
NEVER TIRE OF
RECOUNTING...



THE SULTAN'S MANNER IS ALL CHARM! HIS DELIVERY, ARRESTING! HIS SUBJECT MATTER TOTALLY ABSORBING.

"... AS DID HIS BRIDE, THE DELICIOUS SHEHEREZADE... SHE OF THE INTERMINABLE TALES."



THE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS IS NOT TOTAL MYTH AND LEGEND. MY ANCESTOR, THE WIFE-JEALOUS KING SHAKRYAR, EXISTED...



"LIKEWISE, THE CREATURES THAT INHABITED THE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS... THE **DJINNS**, **AFRITES**, **GENIES**! ALL THE HORROR FIGURES OF OUR EASTERN DEMONOLOGY... THEY EXISTED, AS SURELY AS THE **VAMPIRES**, **DAEMONS** AND **CACODEMONS**, **BOGGARTS**, **BANSHEES**, **GHOULS** AND **IMPS** OF YOUR OCCIDENTAL CULTURE."

WE HAVE A **DJINN** IN THE CRYPT BELOW THE PALACE...! CAPTURED BY ANOTHER ANCESTOR OF MINE AND KEPT FOREVER IMPRISONED THERE. BY THE POWER OF AN **UNSPEAKABLE INCANTATION** CARVED OVER THE ENTRANCE ARCH...!



SUH, YOU DON'T MEAN?



THE DJINN INSIST ON ONLY **HUMAN FLESH**...

...TONIGHT, HE HAS **YOU**!

THE SULTANA'S EYES ARE IRIDESCENT WITH HER SUDDEN, SAVAGE TRIUMPH.

ESCORT THE PERFORMERS TO THE CRYPT!

YOUR REVENGE IS COMPLETE, O' JEWEL ABOVE PRICE. I SHALL NOW RETIRE. MAY I BE PERMITTED TO ANTICIPATE THE ENJOYMENT OF YOUR SPECIAL DELIGHTS THIS NIGHT?

NOT TONIGHT, DARLING. I FEEL KIND OF... TIRED.

SUH! I BEG YOU! A PAUSE FOR A LITTLE REFRESHMENT. A FEW MOMENTS FOR SPIRITUAL CONSOLATION!

THE SANDS HAVE RUN OUT, MY FRIEND. YOU HAVE AN ETERNITY FOR MATTERS SPIRITUAL. TAKE THEM AWAY!

MEANWHILE...

THEY PICK THEMSELVES UP, SAVE FOR THE DRIPPING OF DAMP STONework, ALL IS SILENCE IN THE HORRENDOUS CRYPT.

AAAARRGGGHH!

I SENSE THE PRESENCE OF LOATHSOME EVIL! EVIL SO VILE THAT THE VERY STARS WOULD DIM WITH THE HORROR OF IT!

VAMPI...
TELL ME...!
GIVE IT TO ME
STRAIGHT,
WITHOUT
THE
TRIMMINGS...!
JUST WHAT
IS A
DJINN?

IT'S A KIND OF ORIENTAL **DAEMON**,
STEEPED IN **COSMIC ABOMINATION**,
WITH THE POWER OF ASSUMING
HUMAN AND ANIMAL FORMS AT WILL.
IT CAN ALSO BRING A **SUPERNATURAL**
INFLUENCE TO BEAR OVER
MANKIND...!



FORTUNATELY, I AM
NOT ONE OF **MANKIND**
...IN **ANY** SENSE!

UNHAPPILY,
I **AM**... IN
EVERY
SENSE!



AND THEN...

GOOD EVENING.
AND WHO DO I HAVE
THE INESTIMABLE
PLEASURE OF
ADDRESSING?

HELL, WHAT
A RELIEF...! THE
FELLER'S A
GENTLEMAN!



BUT THE GIRL FROM THE VAMPIRE PLANET OF
DRAKULON KNOWS BETTER THAN TO BE
DECEIVED BY OUTWARD APPEARANCES!


FIEND! SHOW
YOURSELF AS YOU ARE!

AS I AM?
HAH!



THEN BEGINS THE **HORROR**
PILED ON **HORROR**...





I DEFY YOU! IF
YOU ARE A CREATURE
OF LIVING BLOOD, I
WILL DRAIN YOUR
BLOOD!

THE LOVELY **DRAKULONNE**, WHO CAN
ONLY LIVE AS A NORMAL WOMAN BY
DRINKING **BLOOD SUBSTITUTE** SERUM
EVERY TWENTY-FOUR HOURS, IS A **SHE-
VAMPIRE!** IN TIMES OF **MORTAL
STRESS**, HER **BLOOD-LUST** QUENCHES
ALL HER FINER FEELINGS!
THIS IS SUCH A TIME!!

THE SHE-BAT RISES...
STRIKES... PIERCES...
GORGES!!!

AAAAAAWWWWKK!-
KKKKK!



THE NEWS REACHES
THE SULTAN.

MAJESTY!
MAJESTY!
THE DJINN IS
DEAD!

MAY THE STARS
BE PRAISED! WHAT A
BLESSED RELIEF!



AND THEN... **DISASTER!**

QUEEN OF MY DESIRES,
HAVE YOU HEARD THAT
THE DJINN IS...

OH!... I
SEE THAT YOU
PROBABLY
HAVE NOT...

...BEING
OTHERWISE
ENGAGED!

EEEEEEKKK!



IT IS ALL OVER...

IT CEASES TO
EXIST!

NO, PENDY!
DON'T LOOK!

THE DJINN HAS ASSUMED
ITS **TRUE** FORM...

AS A MORTAL,
YOU COULDN'T
LOOK UPON
IT AND
LIVE!



THE SULTANA IS PLAYFULLY FLOATING BACK TO EARTH
FROM THE SEVENTH HEAVEN.

DIVINE ONE...THIS
MAN KRUGER, FOR WHOSE
SAKE YOU TOOK VENGEANCE
ON VAMPIRELLA, WAS **HE**
A GOOD LOVER?

JEALOUS, MY
LUSTY BOY? NO, HE
WAS JUST MY MAN, MY
PROTECTOR! BUT THAT
CREATURE RUINED HIM,
MADE HIM LESS THAN
NOTHING, SO THAT **I**
HAD TO KILL HIM. THAT'S
WHY **SHE** DIED,
MY PET!

REMEMBER
OUR MARRIAGE
BOND! NO MATTER
WHAT I DO, YOU
CAN'T HARM A
HAIR OF MY HEAD!

NOR SHALL I,
DREAM OF SENSUALITY
... NOR SHALL I...



VAMPIRELLA AND PENDRAGON FIND THEMSELVES
FETTERED AS HONORED, DEPARTING GUESTS.

YOU'RE **GLAD** TO BE RID OF
HIM... MAJESTY?

THE DJINN HAS BEEN
USEFUL AS A **GARBAGE
DISPOSAL UNIT** DOWN
THE CENTURIES, MY DEAR. BUT
A **SOCIAL EMBARRASSMENT**.
I NEED ONLY TOUCH LIGHTLY
ON THE SUBJECT OF HIS
DREADFUL HALITOSIS...!

SIX MONTHS LATER, IN THE SULTANA'S GLASS-
WALLED BEDCHAMBER, WHERE SHE SO LOVED TO
GAZE UPON HER **DELICIOUS BODY...**

HOW CAN YOU
TREAT ME LIKE THIS
... **TORTURE** ME
SO?

IS IT TORTURE,
O'DREAM OF PARADISE,
TO LOAD YOU WITH
THE FINEST JEWELS
AND TO TEMPT YOUR
PALATE WITH THE MOST
EXOTIC DISHES THAT THE
FINEST CHEFS FROM PARIS,
FRANCE, CAN DEVISE?

FOR INSTANCE, YOUR MENU
FOR TODAY, O' PETAL OF THE
JASMINE, IS... PEACOCKS'
TONGUES STUFFED WITH
TRUFFLES, LIGHTLY SAUTÉED
AND SERVED WITH A PIQUANTE
SAUCE OF DOVE'S BRAINS,
GARNISHED WITH PINCHES
OF GOLD DUST...

...**ONE HUNDRED
AND FIFTY POUNDS
WEIGHT OF IT, MY
BELOVED.**

THE SULTAN PRODUCES
AN **INSTRUMENT**.

...DELICATELY INTRODUCED
INTO YOUR ADORABLE STOMACH,
AS USUAL, BY THIS DEVICE,
EMPLOYED IN STRASBOURG TO
FORCE-FEED THE **GEESSE** THAT
PRODUCE **PATÉ DE FOIE GRAS!**

SIX MONTHS OF FORCED-FEEDING HAVE
GREATLY **CHANGED** THE SELF-WORSHIP-
PING SULTANA. **THE SULTAN'S REVENGE
IS COMPLETE!**

OPEN WIDE,
MY LITTLE DESERT
FLOWER...

VAMPIRELLA OFTEN
REMARKS...

I WONDER WHATEVER
BECAME OF DROGA,
PENDY?

I DUNNO, VAMPI. BUT
YOU'VE GOT TO HAND IT
TO THAT DAME,
MILLIONAIRE'S MOLL,
SULTANA OF ASHIB... SHE'S
A GAL WHO ALWAYS
THINKS **BIG...**

...BUT SHE MUST
BE FEELING PRETTY
FED-UP BY NOW!

END

THE COMIC BOOKS

By Joe Brancatelli

THE WORST AND THE DULLEST

Maybe the best thing about writing a comic-book column is that I don't have to talk about comic strips. That means I can all but ignore the National Cartoonists Society (NCS), easily the most pompous and boorish organization ever to toddle down the comics pike. The NCS, asinine guardian of mediocrity that it is, has a habit of committing blunder after blunder after inane blunder—and that can get mighty boring to write about.

Take the NCS' annual Reuben Awards dinner in April, for instance. Now the "Reuben" is ostensibly the highest honor a cartoonist can receive, since it is named after the deified Rube Goldberg and awarded only to "the outstanding cartoonist of the year." This year's Reuben went to Ernie Bushmiller—who apparently qualified strictly on longevity. Bushmiller has managed to keep *Nancy*, the world's dullest strip, unflaggingly dull for more than five decades.

In picking Bushmiller, the NCS members chose to overlook *Doonesbury* creator Garry Trudeau, who's never won a Reuben, but who *is* the only comic-strip artist ever to win a Pulitzer Prize. The NCS also ignored Burne Hogarth—again—as it has ignored him every year since Milton Caniff won the first Reuben in 1946. In choosing Bushmiller, the NCS ignored editorial cartoonists Paul Szep and Paul Conrad. They've never won Reubens either, but each has two Pulitzers to their credit. (Szep's second, coincidentally enough, came only days after the Reuben Dinner on April 18). I don't want to push the point, but in choosing Bushmiller, who simply isn't worthy of a Reuben on artistic grounds, the NCS ignored

more deserving candidates like Brant Parker, Pulitzer-prize winning editorial cartoonist Jeff MacNelly, illustrator David Levine, Harvey Kurtzman and *New Yorker* cartoonists Charles Addams, Whitney Darrow, Charles Saxon, George Booth, George Price, Ed Koren and many others. The have-nots are in good company, though. Harold Grey never won a Reuben for *Little Orphan Annie*, nor did James Thurber, Peter Arno or Alan Dunn.

But what the hell, that's comic strips and editorial cartoons and magazine illustrators, right? And this is a comic-book column, right?

Well, as it happens, The NCS has been giving a plaque for best "comic book" cartoonist every year since 1956, too, and I'll bet you have no idea who won this year's silver bauble.

Tex Blaisdell, a former comic-strip second stringer who's been hacking out totally undistinguished work for DC ever since he left *Little Orphan Annie* in 1974.

Lest you think the NCS just happened to have a particularly bad streak in 1977, what with picking Bushmiller and Blaisdell in the same year, let's peek into the group's less than illustrious track record. As poor as the NCS has been in honoring their own comic-strip greats, they've fared even worse with comic-book luminaries. Strictly off the top of my head, here's a list of uncontestedly worthy comic-book artisans who've never gotten a sniff of NCS silver: Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Julie Schwartz, Steve Ditko, Neal Adams, Gardner Fox, Basil Wolverton, Reed Crandall, Bill Everett, Russ Heath and Joe Orlando. That's not to mention all the comic-book greats whose careers ended before the NCS recognized funny books in 1956 or young turks like Roy Thomas, Neal Adams, Denny O'Neil

and Rich Corben and all of the undergrounders.

Who then, you might ask, *has* won NCS plaques for excellence in comic books? Lessee, now. A decade after he left *Batman*, the strip where he did his only noteworthy comic-book work, Jerry Robinson won the first plaque awarded in 1956. He won the honor, one presumes, based on all those awful war, horror and romance stories he drew for Stan Lee in 1955. Even then things were not *that* bad. Bob Oksner won the plaque in 1960 and again in 1961, no doubt in recognition of his work on all those relent-

In choosing this year's Reuben winner, The NCS once again overlooked Doonesbury creator Garry Trudeau, even though he's the only comic strip artist ever to win a Pulitzer Prize!

lessly dreadful DC television and movie rip-off books like *Jerry Lewis*, *Dobie Gillis* and *Sgt. Bilko*.

Bob Gustafson won the comic-book award twice, too, in 1962 and 1971. Paul Fung took the 1964 plaque and Frank Johnson copped a decade later. Don't worry if you don't recognize those names. For the last 20 years or so, those so-called "best cartoonists" have been doing nothing more than transferring *Beetle Bailey*, *Blondie* and *Hi & Lois* from comic strips to comic books. Indubitably worthy of high recognition.

But wait, it gets better. Wally Wood won his third comic-book plaque in 1965, following awards in 1957 and 1959. His first two wins came on the heels of his brilliant work in *Mad* in 1956 and 1958, of course,

but do you know how Wood won in 1965? He won, one would guess, off his one *Daredevil* story, since that was the sum total of his comic-book work in 1964. Al Williamson won the 1966 award. His total 1965 comic-book output was 10 stories, all dreadful except for a *Blazing Combat* collaboration with Angelo Torres. Apparently hoping to outdo itself, the NCS gave the 1967, 1968 and 1969 prizes to Will Eisner. Eisner's combined comic-book production in those three years was two—count 'em two—*Spirit* stories for the short-lived Harvey Comics series. Any Eisner fan will also tell you those two stories are far and away the worst of the hundreds Eisner did over the years. In 1970, Tom Gill won the prize off the strength of his totally ignorable work on the *Twilight Zone* and other similarly forgettable Gold Key books and Frank Springer was handed 1974's laurel for his fistful of hacked-out suspense yarns for Marvel.

Now aren't you glad I don't cover comic strips in this column?

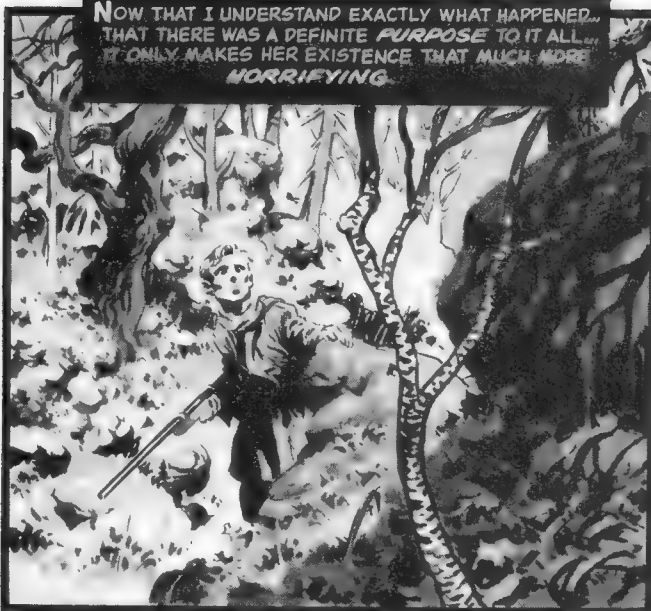
BY THE NUMBERS

Excuse the cliché, but there was good news and there was bad news in the annual reports issued recently by Cadence and Warner Communications, the parent companies of Marvel and DC.

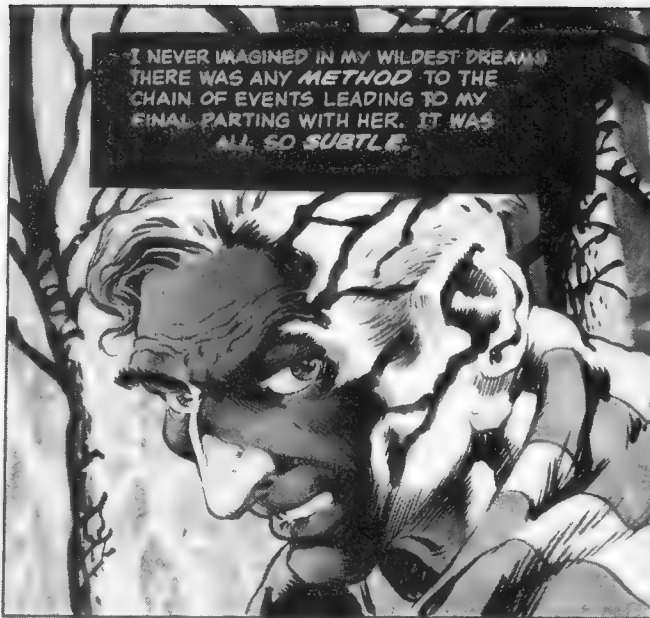
The good news was that both conglomerates registered record sales and profits in the 1976 fiscal year. On the down side, however, the comic-book companies apparently had a sluggish year, Marvel managing only small gains and DC suffering through another disappointing twelve months.

Next month's column will carry all the details fresh from the glossy annual reports, pristine proxy statements and mysterious 10-K forms.

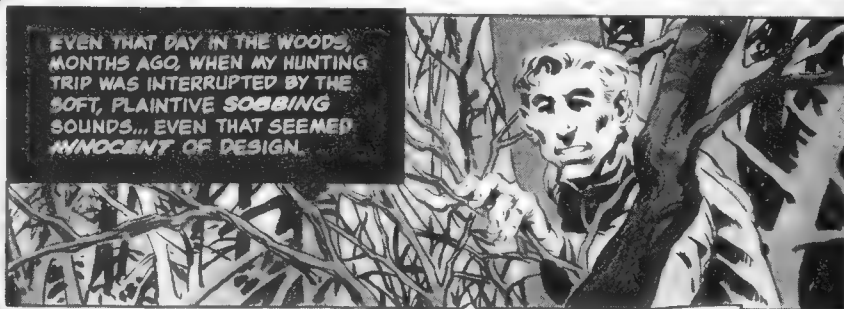
NOW THAT I UNDERSTAND EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED...
THAT THERE WAS A DEFINITE **PURPOSE** TO IT ALL...
IT ONLY MAKES HER EXISTENCE THAT MUCH MORE
HORRIFYING.



I NEVER IMAGINED IN MY WILDEST DREAMS
THERE WAS ANY **METHOD** TO THE
CHAIN OF EVENTS LEADING TO MY
FINAL PARTING WITH HER. IT WAS
ALL SO **SUBTLE.**



EVEN THAT DAY IN THE WOODS,
MONTHS AGO, WHEN MY HUNTING
TRIP WAS INTERRUPTED BY THE
SOFT, PLAINTIVE **SOBBING**
SOUNDS... EVEN THAT SEEMED
INNOCENT OF DESIGN.



THAT WAS THE DAY I FIRST
SAW HER **FACE**, FIRST
LOOKED INTO HER **EYES**,
FIRST HEARD HER **NAME...**

JENIFER

DEAR
GOD!



WRIGHTSON





THE *GIRL!*
I'D BETTER SEE
IF SHE'S ALL RI--
**GOD IN
HEAVEN!**



I'VE NEVER
SEEN ANYTHING
SO **HIDEOUS!**



DEFORMED
OR *NOT*, NO
CREATURE
DESERVES *THIS*.

ARE YOU
ALL RIGHT?
DID HE *HURT*
YOU?



DOESN'T UNDERSTAND A
WORD I SAY... OBVIOUSLY
RETARDED. I'D BETTER
GET HER TO THE
AUTHORITIES.

BUT WHAT
ABOUT
HIM?



I'VE TAKEN A *LIFE!* EVEN IF I'M *CLEARED*
IN COURT... WHEN THE *NEWSPAPERS*
GET HOLD OF THIS, IT'LL BE A *SCANDAL!*
MY BUSINESS WILL BE *RUINED!*

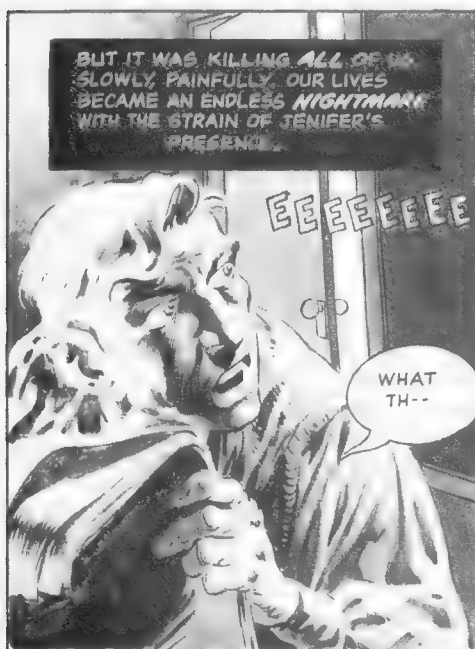
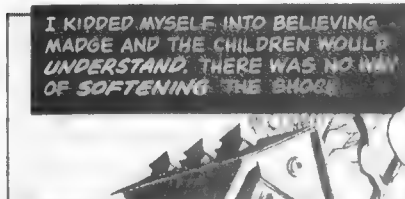
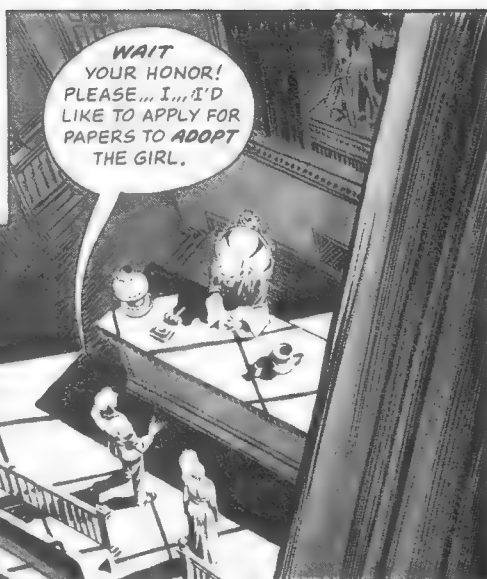
OR IS THERE
ANOTHER
WAY?



OF *COURSE!*
NO ONE *SAW* ME
SHOOT HIM! I'LL TELL
THE AUTHORITIES I *FOUND*
THE GIRL WANDERING IN
THE WOODS! IT'LL
WORK! IT *WILL!*

I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN *THEN*
I WAS BEGINNING TO ACT
IRRATIONALLY. SOMETHING SHOULD
HAVE *TOLD* ME. BUT IT WAS TOO EARLY.
I WAS FAR TOO NAIVE... FAR TOO *SANE.*

THE AUTHORITIES ~~DID~~ BELIEVE ME, AND NO TRACE OF THE GIRL'S PARENTS OR NEXT OF KIN COULD BE FOUND. IT WAS RIGHT AFTER THE JUDGE HAD ANNOUNCED HIS PLANS TO PLACE JENIFER IN AN INSTITUTION THAT I FIRST FELT HER EYES UPON ME. THOSE BLACK, HIDEOUSLY COMPELLING EYES...



MY NIGHTS BECAME RIDDLED WITH **INSOMNIA**. I LOST WEIGHT, GREW HAGGARD.

I MEAN IT THIS TIME, JIM! EITHER YOU GET RID OF HER OR I'M TAKING THE **CHILDREN** OUT OF HERE.

MADGE... PLEASE!

I TRIED TO FIND ANOTHER HOME FOR JENIFER. I **REALLY** TRIED! BUT HALFWAY TO THE INSTITUTION, SHE'D BEGIN THAT AWFUL SILENT **PLEADING**... THOSE **BULBOUS** PROTRUSIONS THAT WERE HER **EYES** WOULD FILL, AND **TEARS** WOULD START DOWN HER DISTORTED CHEEKS...

JENIFER... DEAR GOD...

WELL?

I... THEY WERE **OVER-CROWDED**. I'LL TRY AGAIN **TOMORROW**...

BUT THE **TOMORROW** STRETCHED INTO WEEKS, THE WEEKS INTO MONTHS. MADGE AND I WERE BARELY SPEAKING. THE **PRESSURE** WAS UNBEARABLE. THE DAM WAS ABOUT TO **BURST**...

IF I JUST HAD THE **STRENGTH**... IF I COULD GET RID OF HER WITHOUT **LOOKING** AT HER...

OH, LORD!

JIM! WHAT IS IT?!

MADGE, STAY BACK... DON'T **LOOK!**

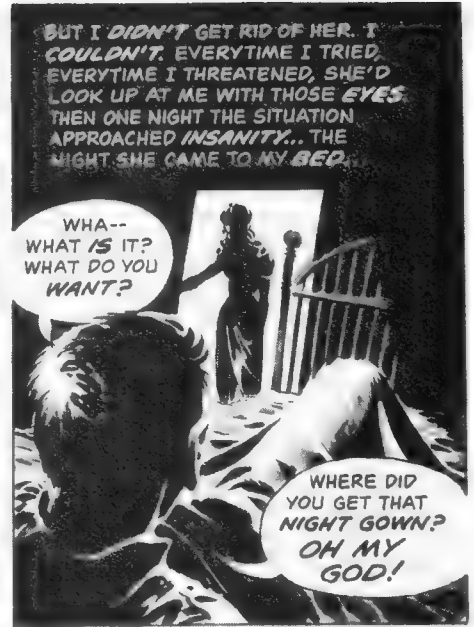
NO... NO... OH, GOD NO... (CHOKE)



THERE WAS NO POINT IN ASKING
MADGE TO RECONSIDER. NO POINT
KEEPING BEATING SO I DON'T
TRY...



YOU LITTLE
HORROR. YOU'LL
PAY FOR THIS, I
SWEAR! I'LL GET
RID OF YOU
SOMEHOW!



BUT I DIDN'T GET RID OF HER. I
COULDN'T. EVERYTIME I TRIED,
EVERYTIME I THREATENED, SHE'D
LOOK UP AT ME WITH THOSE EYES.
THEN ONE NIGHT THE SITUATION
APPROACHED *INSANITY*... THE
NIGHT SHE CAME TO MY BED...

WHA--
WHAT IS IT?
WHAT DO YOU
WANT?

WHERE DID
YOU GET THAT
NIGHT GOWN?
OH MY
GOD!



THAT'S
ONE OF
MADGE'S GOWNS!
YOU *STOLE* IT!
NO! GET AWAY
FROM ME! GET
AWAY!

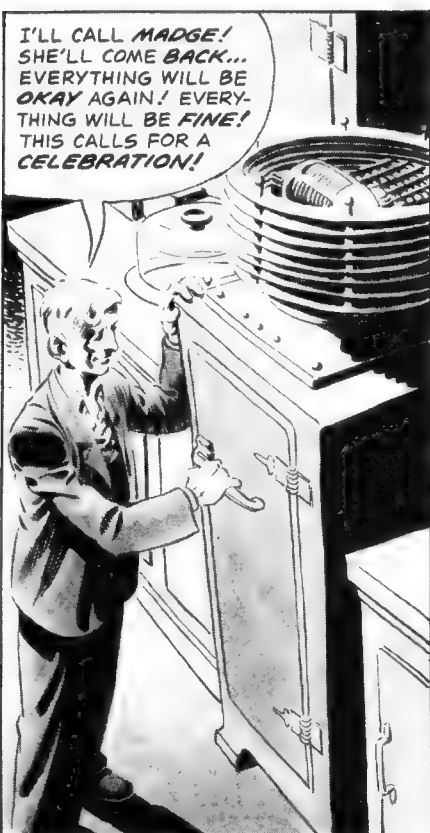
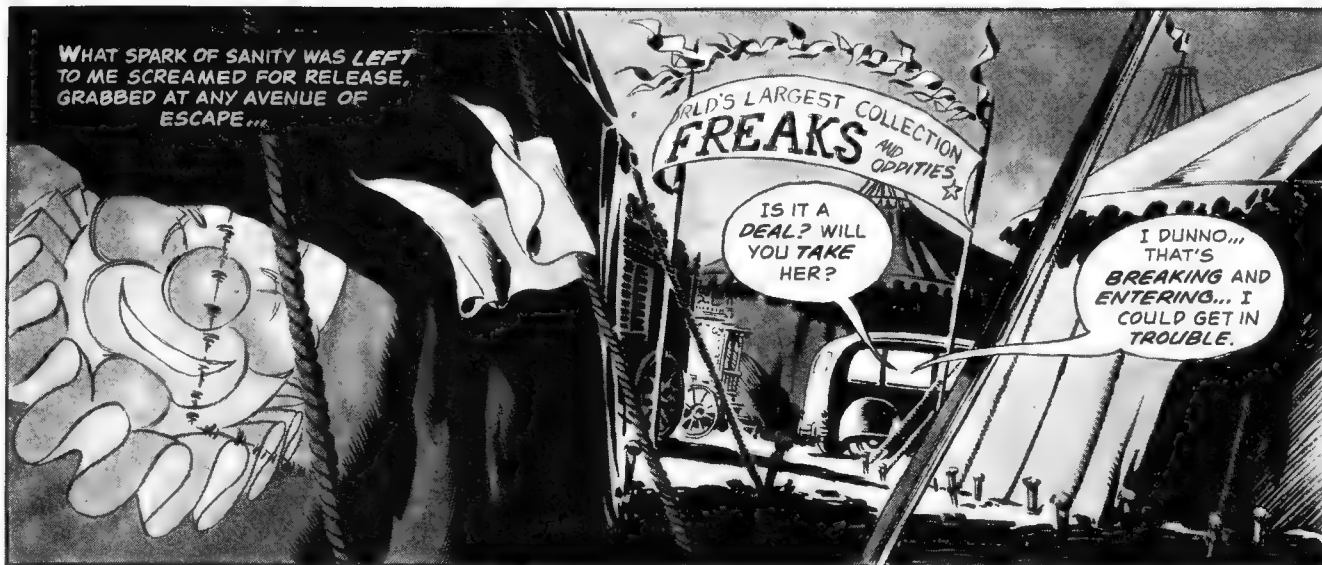


JENIFER,
NO!
PLEASE!

LORD...!
HELP ME...
HELP ME...



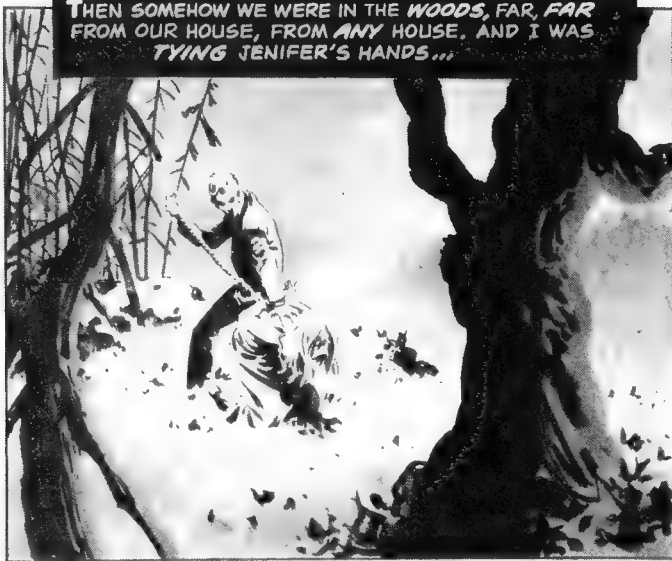
... HELP
ME ...







THEN SOMEHOW WE WERE IN THE **WOODS**, FAR, FAR FROM OUR HOUSE, FROM **ANY** HOUSE. AND I WAS **TYING** JENIFER'S HANDS...



AND I JUST **SAT** THERE QUIETLY. NOTHING STIRRED. I STARED AT JENIFER AND SHE STARED BACK. FOR **HOURS**. UNTIL I HEARD THE FOOTSTEPS...



IT WAS **THEN** I REALIZED HER FULL **POWER**, HER FULL DEVESTATING **POTENTIAL**...



I TRIED TO **SCREAM**. MY **THROAT** WOULDN'T WORK. I **CHOKED** ON MY **TEARS**...



PLEASE!!!



THERE WAS NO WAY TO EXPLAIN. NO **TIME** TO EXPLAIN... BARELY THE STRENGTH TO UTTER A **FEEBLE WARNING** AS HER **POWER** FADED AND **NIGHT** CLOSED IN FOREVER...



JENIFER...

END

WE DON'T PUBLISH A NEW MAGAZINE OFTEN!

**When we do, it's an
earth-shattering event!**



**Watch for WARREN's
explosive new comics magazine.**

On sale soon.

GROUND ROUND

"DONE," THOUGHT MARTIN CHINN HAPPILY AS HE WIPED HIS SMALL HANDS CAREFULLY ACROSS THE FRONT OF HIS BLOODIED BUTCHER'S SMOCK, "DONE, DONE, DONE!"

SHE HAD HAD IT COMING FOR YEARS, OF COURSE. WHAT WITH HER CONSTANT **NAGGINGS** AND **BADGERINGS**... THE CEASELESS **WHINING** OF HER SHRILL, HIGH PITCHED VOICE. IT WAS INEVITABLE. AND WHEN SHE'D SUGGESTED SELLING THE GROCERY AND MOVING TO FLORIDA....!

WELL, THAT WAS JUST TOO MUCH. THE FINAL STRAW. SO HE HAD TAKEN THE SHARP, GLEAMING MEAT CLEAVER AND...

...AND NOW SHE WAS DEAD. MARTIN CHINN DOUBTED THAT ANYONE WOULD **BLAME** HIM. NOT REALLY. AFTER ALL, SHIRLEY HAD ALWAYS BEEN SUCH A **SHREW**.

BUT STILL, HE SHOULD **HIDE** HER BODY JUST THE SAME. AND HE KNEW JUST THE **PLACE**.

THE **MEAT** FREEZER! SURE! WHY NOT?

SHIRLEY HAD HATED THE **SNOW** AND THE **COLD** OF WINTER. IT WAS A **POETIC JUSTICE** OF SORTS.

LUGGING HER HEAVY BODY, MARTIN WANTED TO **LAUGH**.

PUFF! **GASP!**

MARTIN FELT **GOOD!** THE ONE IRRITATION IN HIS LIFE WAS **GONE!**

TING-A-RING



AFTER LATCHING THE FRONT DOOR, MARTIN RESUMED HIS TASK.

WHEW! SHE'S HEAVY! NOTHING BUT FAT!



HE PAUSED, DAUBING AT THE PERSPIRATION THAT DOTTED HIS FOREHEAD *DESPITE* THE CHILL OF THE FREEZER.

HE REMEMBERED THE COUNTLESS FAD *DIETS* SHIRLEY HAD TRIED. THE INSUFFERABLE *MEALS* HE HAD HAD TO ENDURE BECAUSE OF IT.



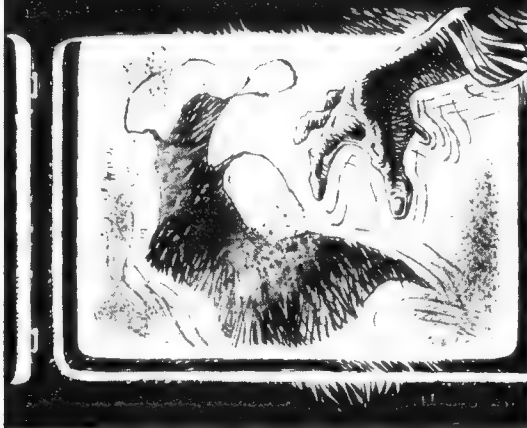
WELL, THAT WAS ALL OVER NOW. SHIRLEY WOULD *NEVER* HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT DIETING AGAIN!

MARTIN STEPPED QUICKLY FROM THE DEEP FREEZE, *SLAMMING* THE HEAVY IRON DOOR BEHIND HIM. THEN HE REMOVED HIS *APRON*.

IT WAS STREAKED WITH *BLOOD*. HER BLOOD.



HE WOULD SIMPLY HAVE TO GET *RID* OF IT.



THEN HE CAREFULLY *CLEANED* THE FLOOR BEHIND THE MEAT CASE. TRUE TO FORM, SHIRLEY HAD BEEN *MESSY*, EVEN IN *DEATH*.

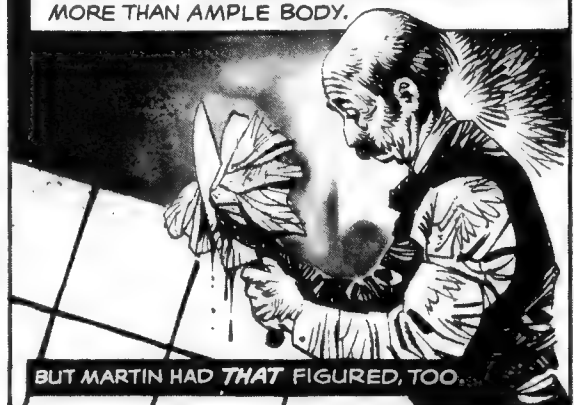


WHEN HE WAS DONE, MARTIN WHISTLED *LIGHTLY*. IT WAS ALL SO *EASY*. HE SHOULD HAVE DONE THIS, HE REFLECTED, *YEARS* AGO.

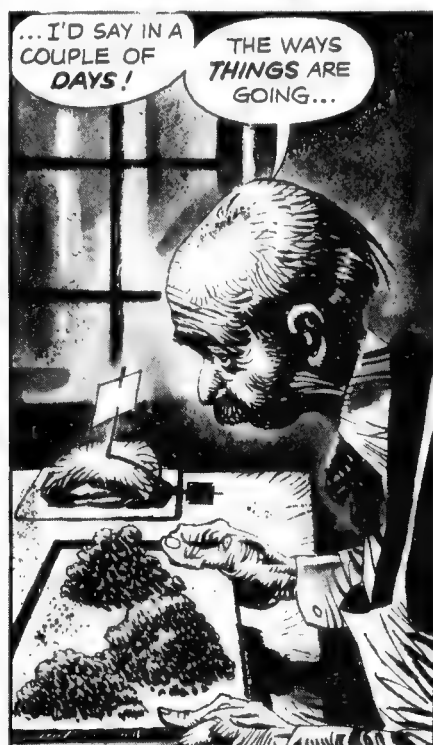
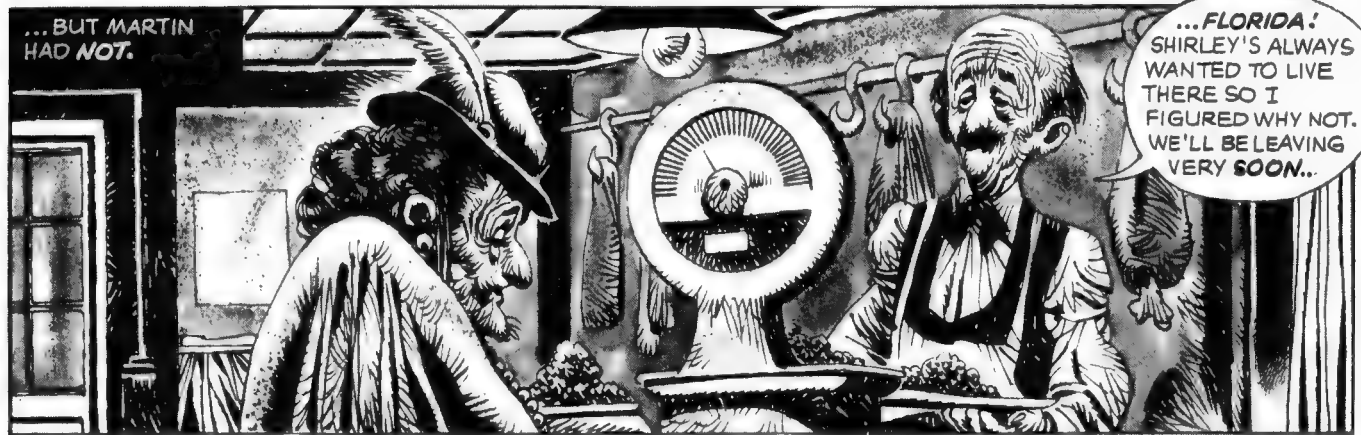
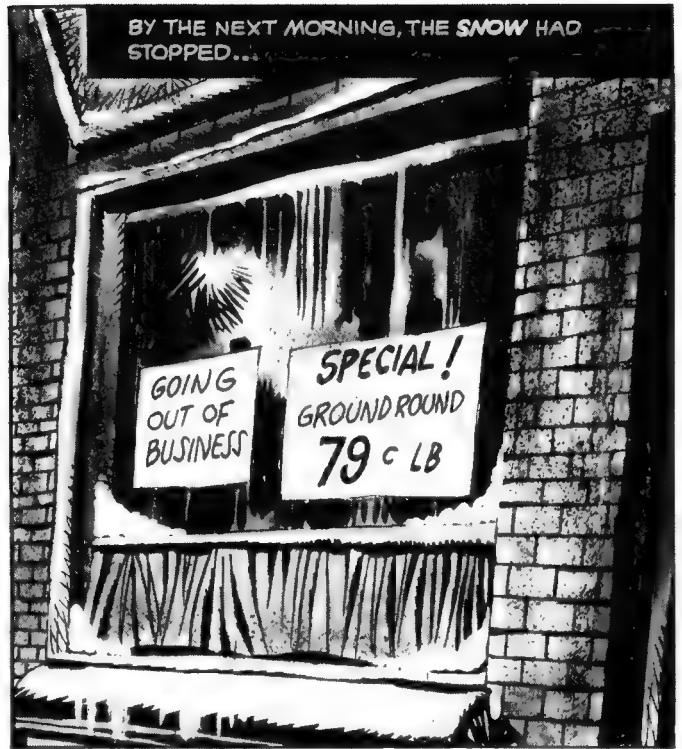
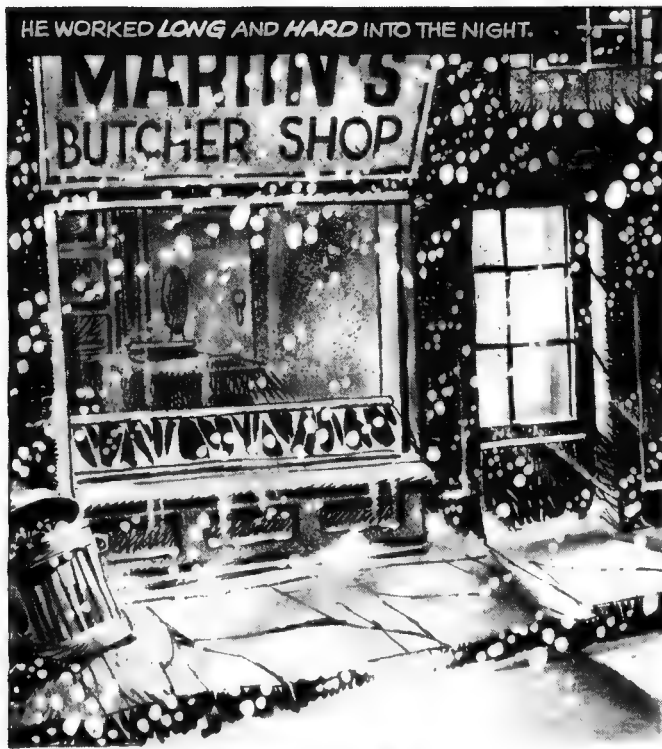


NOW HE WAS *FREE*. RID OF HER *FOREVER*.

OF COURSE THERE WAS STILL THE UNPLEASANT CHORE OF *DISPOSING* OF HER MORE THAN AMPLE BODY.



BUT MARTIN HAD *THAT* FIGURED, TOO.



THEN, JUST BEFORE CLOSING, SHIRLEY'S ONLY FRIEND CAME IN...

OH, MARTIN!

OH, CRAP!

WHERE'S SHIRLEY, THE POOR DEAR? I'VE BROUGHT HER SOME CHICKEN SOUP. IT'S TERRIFIC FOR THE FLU!

SHE'S... UH... UPSTAIRS. SHE--!

GOOD! I'LL JUST TAKE THIS UP TO HER! WON'T BE A SECOND!

NO! YOU CAN'T!

NONSENSE, MARTIN! I WON'T BOTHER HER!

SHE'S ASLEEP! SHE SHOULDN'T BE DISTURBED!

DAMN! I CAN'T LET HER GO UPSTAIRS! IT'LL RUIN EVERYTHING!

♪ ♪ ♪
RUTHIE...!
♪ ♪ ♪

CHOKK!



MARTIN HADN'T COUNTED ON **THIS!**

TREMBLING, HE STARED NUMBLY AT RUTHIE'S SPRAWLED BODY, SPLAYED OUT ON THE FLOOR LIKE A FAT, BROKEN **DOLL**.

STILL, HE THOUGHT, SHE HAD BROUGHT IT ON **HERSELF**. DAMN **BUSYBODY**! HE SUPPOSED HE WOULD HAVE TO DO **SOMETHING....!**



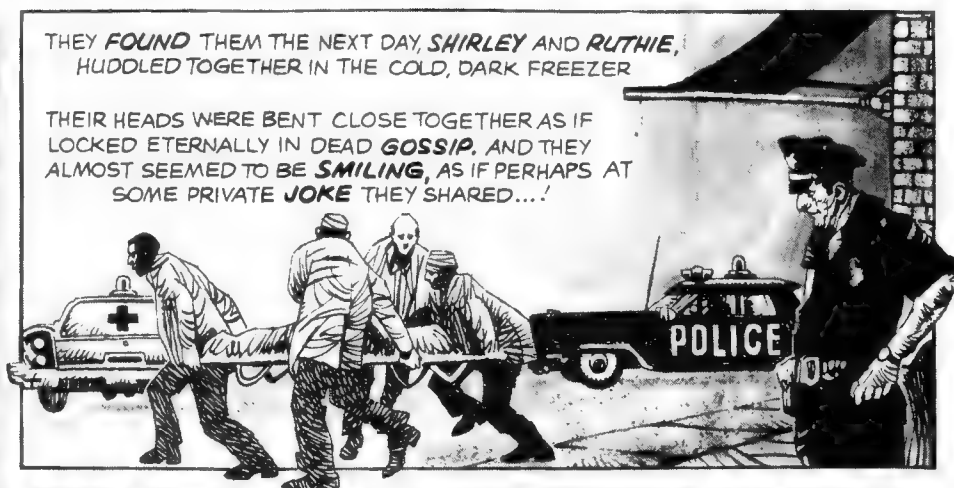
SOMETHING **MOVED** IN THE COLD DARKNESS OF THE FREEZER... SHAMBLING FORWARD SLOWLY ON STIFF, DEAD **LEGS**.

IT SPOKE HALTINGLY, **PAINFULLY**. ITS VOICE WAS **SHRILL**.



THEY **FOUND** THEM THE NEXT DAY, **SHIRLEY** AND **RUTHIE**, HUDDLED TOGETHER IN THE COLD, DARK FREEZER

THEIR HEADS WERE BENT CLOSE TOGETHER AS IF LOCKED ETERNALLY IN DEAD **GOSSIP**. AND THEY ALMOST SEEMED TO BE **SMILING**, AS IF PERHAPS AT SOME PRIVATE **JOKE** THEY SHARED...!



IT AIN'T THE SAME NO MORE...
NOT LIKE IT WUZ THET SPRING.
AN AH RECKON AH BLAME
MAHSELF FER THET MUCH AS
ANYONE. SURE, MEBE GRAMPS
PULLED THE TRIGGER, MEBE
PA WAS USIN' HIS KNIFE, BUT AH
LOST MAH HEAD SAME AS THE
REST OF 'EM!



'T WAS MA, ALONE AMONG US,
WHO HAD WITS ENUF TO DEVISE
A SCHEME. MA WAS LIKE THET,
THOUGH... WHAT'D PA USE TO
CALL HER?... A DESIGNIN'
WOMAN...!

WAL, BE TO IT,
JALEP! WHAT'D YA FETCH US
TODAY?... WOODCHUCK?... HARE?
'TAIN'T VENISON, SURE, 'CAUSE
YA DON'T LUG VENISON IN NO
BURLAP SACK!



QUIT YER SHILLY-
SHALLYIN, SON! WE
AIN'T ET IN A WEEK!

AN WIPE
THET SILLY
GRIN OFTEN
YER FACE, JALEP...
YA LOOK TO BE
TETCHED!

TETCHED IS IT?
Y'ALL'LL THINK
TETCHED WHEN
Y'ALL SEE WHAT'S
A SQUIRMIN' IN
THIS HERE GUNNY
... HEH-HEH!



AS YE SOW...

TONIGHT
WE EAT LIKE
RICH FOLK!

LORDY
BE!

SAKES!

GASP!





THAT WAS AFORE THE **PLAGUE**... AFORE THE DARK **HUNGER** SWEEPED THE COUNTRY AND "LIVINS'" TURNED TO "**DEADS**" AND "**DEADS**" TURNED ON "**LIVIN**"... TILL THERE WERN'T BUT A HANDFUL OF REAL PEOPLE LEFT ON EARTH. AH WUZ SIX WHEN AH "COME OVER"... THE LAST IN THE FAMILY. IT WAS GRAMPS WHO DONE IT...!



AH CAN STILL FEEL HIS HOT BREATH ON MAH NECK... STILL SEE THE LOOK OF WILD HUNGER IN HIS EYES... STILL HEAR MA **SCREAMIN'** AS SHE TRIED TO PULL HIM AWAY. BY NOON THE NEXT DAY, AH HAD THE **BLOOD HUNGER** LIKE ALL THE REST!



AH PAUSED A TIME ON MY WAY BACK TO THE SHACK. ONE EAR OF RUST COLORED **CORN** STILL CLUNG FAITHFULLY TO ITS HUSK. AH RUN MY FINGERS ACROSS ITS PEBBLED SURFACE AND THE **MEM'RIES** COME FLAPPIN' BACK AT ME... MEM'RIES OF PA WALKIN' OVER RUTS OF FRESH PLOWED GROUND, A'SMILIN' IN THE BRIGHT SUN... OF MA CALLIN' US TO SUPPER... OF THE TASTE OF HOT CORN MUFFINS AND SWEET GRAVEY...!



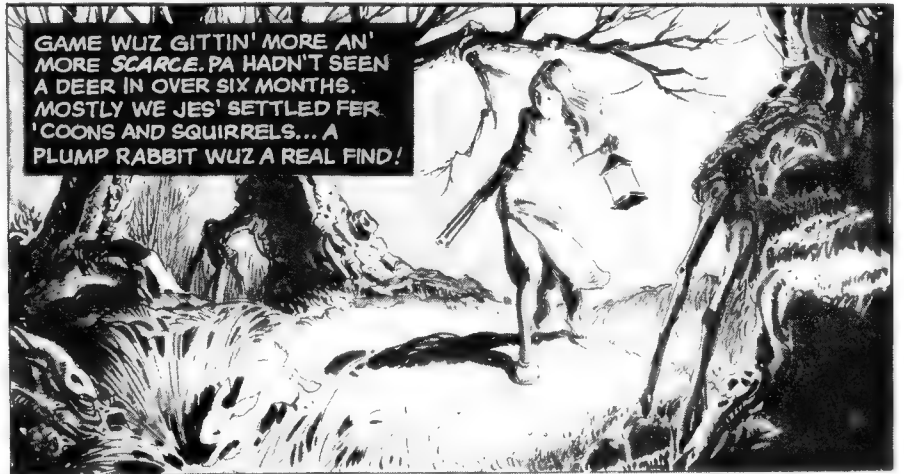
NEXT EVENING EVERYONE WUZ AILIN' FROM SOMETHIN' 'CEPT ME.

MUSTA BEEN THET SUPPER LAS' NIGHT... DISEASED OR SOMETHIN.' YOU BEST TAKE THE RIFLE, ULLA HONEY, AND TRY AN' SCARE UP SOME **GRUB**.

DON'T FRET, PA.



GAME WUZ GITTIN' MORE AN' MORE **SCARCE**. PA HADN'T SEEN A DEER IN OVER SIX MONTHS. MOSTLY WE JES' SETTLED FER 'COONS AND SQUIRRELS... A PLUMP RABBIT WUZ A REAL FIND!



AH DON'T GENERALLY COTTON TO **CAVES**... IT'S A GOOD WAY TO GET CORNERED BY A CLAN OF HUNTIN' "**DEADS**"... BUT AH COULDN'T LET THET LITTLE OL' HARE GO.

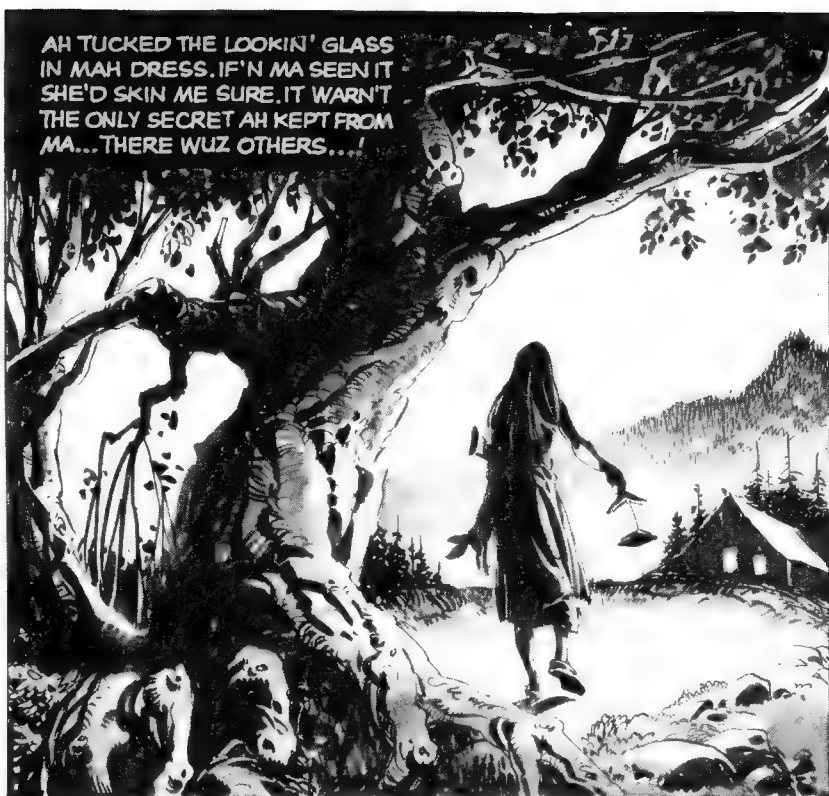


THE INSTANT AH HEERD THE SHUFFLIN' SOUND WITHIN, AH KNOWED IT WERN'T NO **RABBIT**. MAH FINGER TIGHTENED ON THE TRIGGER OF PA'S DOUBLE BARREL...!

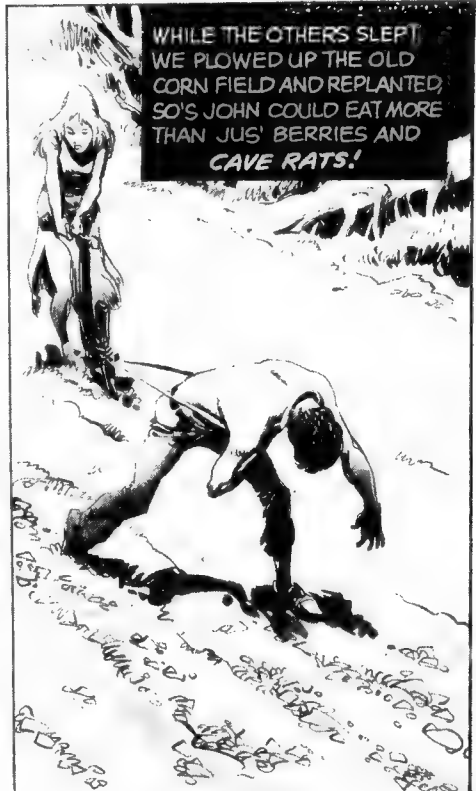
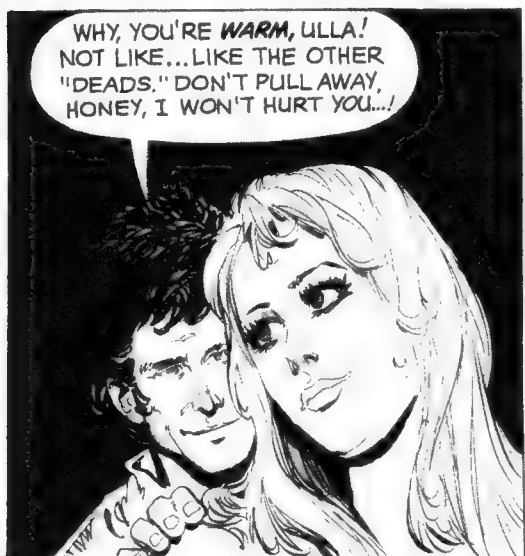


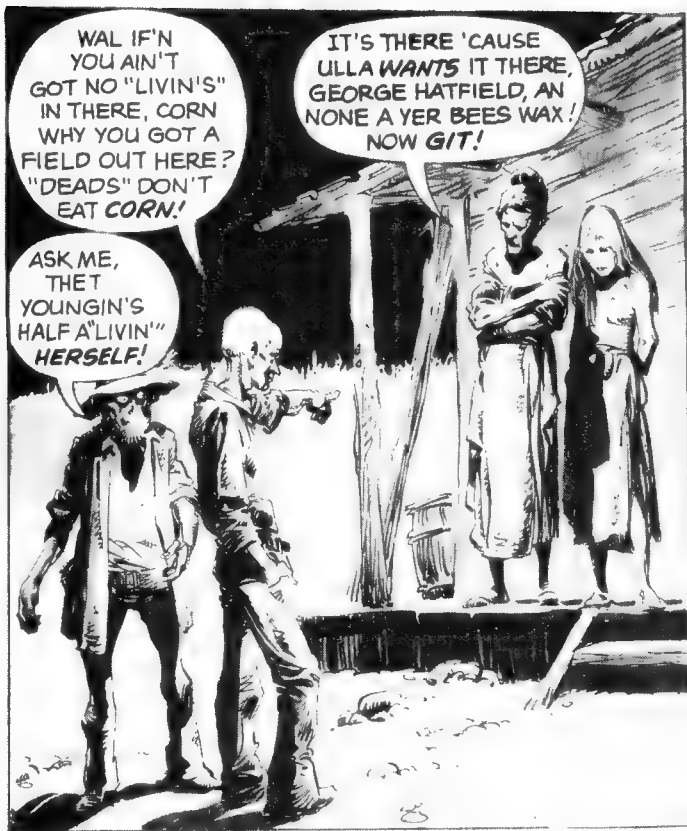
WHO'S THERE?



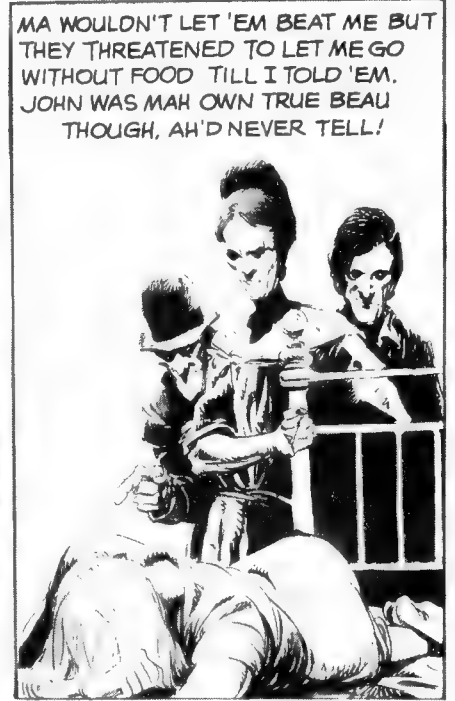








THE MONTHS PASSED... HAPPY MONTHS FER ME AND JOHN. WE KEPT OUR LOVE WELL HIDDEN...UNTIL SOMETHIN' HAPPENED NEITHER OF US COULD HIDE...





IT AIN'T THE SAME NO MORE...
NOT LIKE IT WUZ THET SPRING...
NOT SINCE MA AND THE OTHERS
FOUND HIM...!



AH STILL SEE JOHN *REGLAR*
IN THE CAVE, AN' NO ONE BUT
THE *FAMILY* KNOWS HE'S
THAR...!



WE STILL FEED 'EM EV'RY DAY AN' AH HAD HIS
YOUNG'IN... IN FACT, AH'VE HAD *SIX* OF HIS
YOUNG'IN'S, AN' NEVER SEEN A ONE OF 'EM!
IT'S WHAT THE FAMILY'S BEEN *LIVIN'* OFF OF!



AN' JOHN AND ME STILL SPOONS EVERY NIGHT...
THEY *WANT* US TO... THEY *NUKE* US...



...BUT IT JUS'
AIN'T THE
SAME...!

THE PARABLE OF THE HERMITS OF GLASTONBURY TOR

IT IS CALLED *GLASTONBURY TOR*, AND ITS HISTORY IS AS *COLORFUL* AS THE LAND IT ENCOMPASSES.

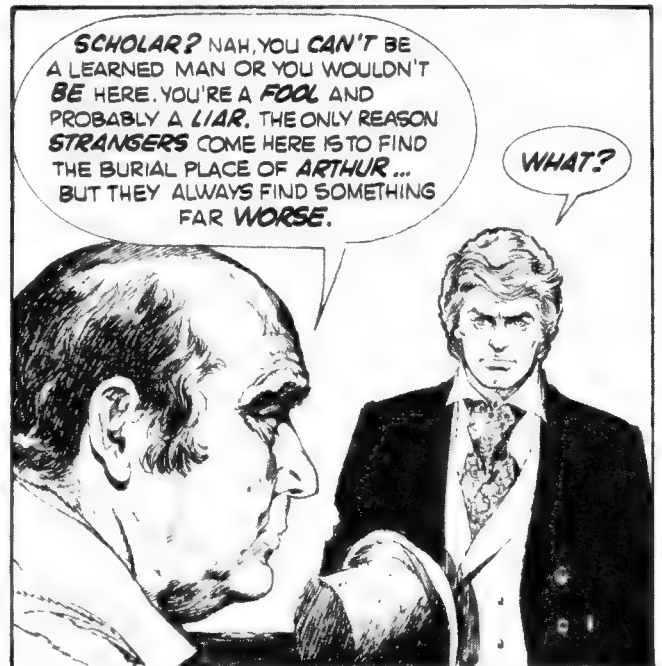
IT STANDS UPON THE *ISLE OF AVAILON* AND WAS, IN *ANCIENT* TIMES, A PAGAN *TEMPLE* TO THE SPIRITS OF THE *DEAD*. BY THE FIFTH CENTURY *GLASTONBURY ABBEY* BECAME A HOME TO MONASTIC CHRISTIAN *HERMITS*, AND THE *BURIAL* GROUNDS OF THE MYTHICAL *KING ARTHUR*.

MANY TRIED TO FATHOM ITS TIMELESS *MYSTERIES*, BUT FOUND ONLY DEATH. IN 1853, AN OXFORD SCHOLAR NAMED *BERTRAND SWANN* VOWED HE WOULD FIND AN *ANSWER*... OR JOIN THOSE WHO HAD FAILED *BEFORE* HIM.



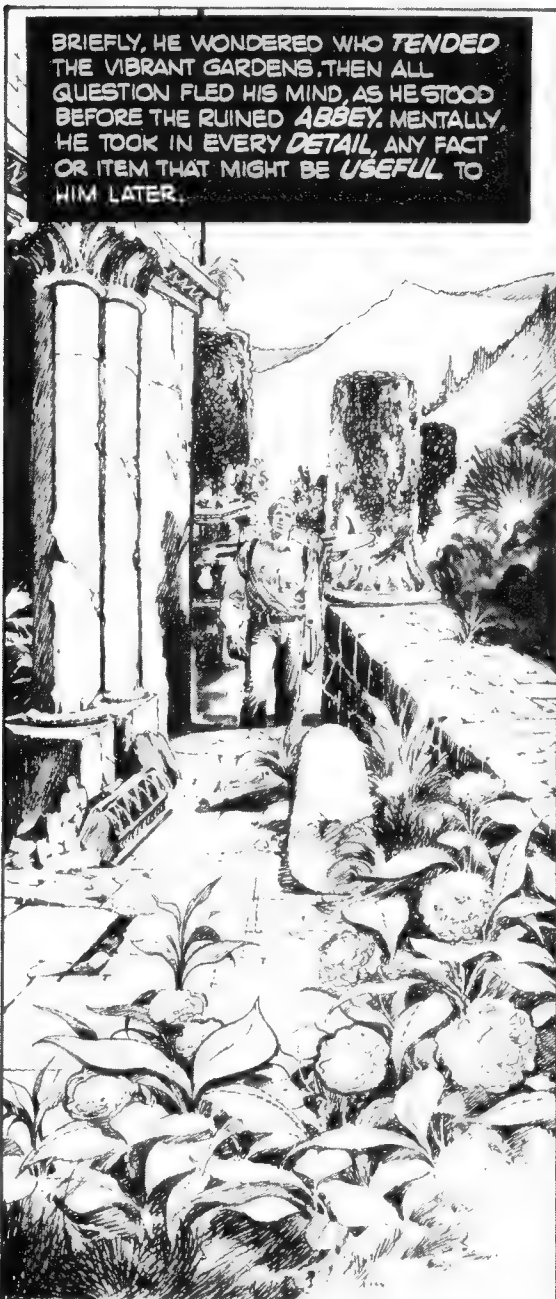
WHAT'S YOUR *BUSINESS* HERE, STRANGER?

I AM A *SCHOLAR*, SIR. SOMETHING WHICH I AM SURE IS A *RARITY* IN THIS VILLAGE. I AM HERE TO COMPLETE A *THESIS* ON THE LOCAL *FOLKLORE*.



SCHOLAR? NAH, YOU *CAN'T* BE A LEARNED MAN OR YOU WOULDN'T *BE* HERE. YOU'RE A *FOOL* AND PROBABLY A *LIAR*. THE ONLY REASON *STRANGERS* COME HERE IS TO FIND THE BURIAL PLACE OF *ARTHUR*... BUT THEY ALWAYS FIND SOMETHING FAR *WORSE*.

WHAT?



HE BEGAN HIS SEARCH IN THE UPPER ROOMS, GRADUALLY WORKING DOWNWARD. THE DAY WAS SPENT RUMMAGING RUINS AND RELICS, EXAMINING, STUDYING, SPECULATING, MAKING NOTES. BUT HIS FINDINGS WERE **SUPERFICIAL** AND OF LITTLE **VALUE**.



AND WHEN NIGHT CAME, HE TOOK SHELTER IN A TINY UPPER CHAMBER THAT, HE HYPOTHEZIZED, HAD ONCE SERVED THE SAME FUNCTION FOR THE **HERMITS**. THERE WERE NO NOTES OR DIARIES TO **CONFIRM** THIS, BUT THESE, HE FELT CERTAIN, WOULD COME WITH TIME AND PATIENT **SEARCH**.



SLEEP WAS **ELUSIVE**, DISTURBED BY THE LOW WHISTLE OF NIGHT WIND THROUGH **CRACKS** IN THE STONE...AN EERIE **WHINE** THAT HE SOMETIMES IMAGINED WAS **TRULY** THE **SPIRITS** WHOM THE ANCIENTS HAD WORSHIPPED.



SHORTLY, AFTER THE STROKE OF MIDNIGHT, HE WAS **VISITED** BY ONE OF THOSE SPIRITS.



W-WHO ARE YOU?

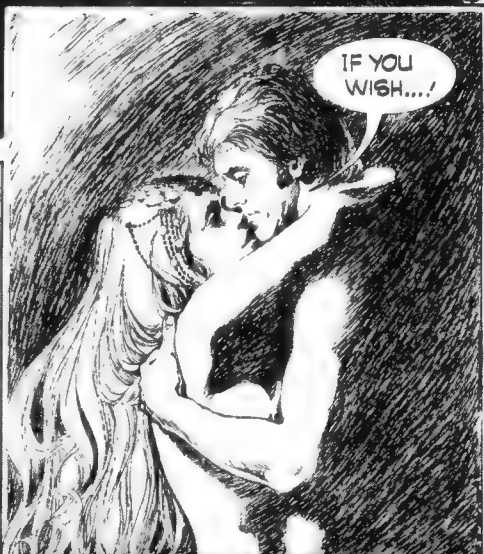
SWANN SENSED THAT HE WAS CONFRONTING THE **GREATEST** OF TOR ABBEY'S MYSTERIES.

I AM SHE WHO YOU DO NOT **QUESTION**. I AM WHAT I AM AND ALSO WHAT **YOU** ARE. IT IS NOT NECESSARY THAT YOU **UNDERSTAND**, ONLY THAT YOU **ACCEPT** AND **PARTAKE**.

PARTAKE?



IF YOU WISH...!



THERE COULD HAVE BEEN A **MILLION** REASONS WHY BERTRAND SWANN MADE LOVE TO THIS WOMAN. FASCINATION, THE DESIRE TO FIND THE ANSWERS HE DESPERATELY SOUGHT... BUT IT WAS **NONE** OF THESE.

HE DID IT BECAUSE HE **WANTED** TO. AND SHE... SHE MADE LOVE LIKE A **GODDESS**. SWANN HAD NEVER IN HIS LIFE FELT SO **ALIVE**.



AND THE FEELING *CONTINUED* UNTIL THE MORNING.

WON'T YOU
TELL ME WHO
YOU *ARE*
NOW?

FOR A *SCHOLAR*
YOU ARE VERY *SLOW*,
MR. SWANN. I AM THAT WHICH
IS WITHIN YOU... WITHIN *ALL*
LIVING THINGS. I AM... *LIFE!*

AT ANY OTHER TIME, IN
ANY OTHER PLACE, WITH
ANY OTHER *WOMAN*...
I'D *LAUGH*. BUT THIS
MORNING... HERE... WITH
YOU... I *BELIEVE!*

I SPEAK THE *TRUTH*. THERE
IS A PLACE ON EARTH WHERE
LIFE AND *DEATH* LIVE
TOGETHER IN *HARMONY*.
YOU HAVE *FOUND* THAT
PLACE, BERTRAND SWANN.

SO HAVE
OTHERS
BEFORE ME.

YES, BUT THEY DID
NOT KNOW HOW TO *COPE*
WITH WHAT THEY FOUND.
AS I SAID BOTH *LIFE* AND
DEATH DWELL HERE...!
MEN ARE FREE TO CHOSE
THAT WHICH IS MORE
ATTRACTIVE TO THEM.

WHAT COULD POSSIBLY
BE MORE BEAUTIFUL
THAN *YOU*?

YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED
THE PLEASURES OF *LIFE*.
NOW COME MEET THAT
WHICH RULES THE *DEAD*.

THEN THE
EARLY PAGANS
WERE *RIGHT!*

SO WERE THE *CHRISTIANS!*
FOR YOU SEE, THE SEVEN
MINISTERS OF *DEATH* ARE...

THE HERMITS OF
GLASTONBURY TOR!

INDEED. FROM LEFT TO
RIGHT... *WAR, FAMINE,*
DISEASE, AGE,
CATASTROPHE, SUICIDE,
AND *FATE!*

...HERMITS!



I DON'T *UNDERSTAND*. WHY WOULD *ANYONE* CHOSE THE *HERMITS* OVER A GODDESS LIKE *YOU*?

OH, THEY DIDNT AT *FIRST*. BUT AS TIME WENT ON, THEY INEVITABLY *RELINQUISHED* THEIR CLAIM TO *IMMORTALITY* AND... WELL, THAT IS NOT *IMPORTANT*.



WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS THAT YOU *CHOOSE*. I AM *LIFE*, AND I WOULD HAVE YOU FOR MY *MATE*. IF YOU *ACCEPT*, YOU ARE FREE TO TASTE MY PLEASURES, AND ROAM THE BOUNTEOUS *GARDENS* OF GLASTONBURY TOR... *FOREVER*.

IF YOU *CHOOSE NOT* TO ACCEPT...



...THEN YOU *TOO* RELINQUISH YOUR CLAIM TO *IMMORTALITY*, AND THE MINISTERS OF *DEATH* ARE FREE TO TAKE YOU AS THEIR OWN.

ARE YOU SAYING I HAVE A CHOICE BETWEEN *PARADISE* AND *HELL*? THEN YOU *KNOW* MY ANSWER! LIFE, I WILL BECOME YOUR *GROOM*.



THEN TOMORROW, THE HERMITS SHALL *MARRY* US. BUT FIRST, I MUST *WARN* YOU... THERE ARE TWO *CONDITIONS* IMPOSED ON OUR MARRIAGE!

FIRST... ONCE YOU BECOME *IMMORTAL*, YOU MUST NEVER *LEAVE* THE ABBEY. IT IS FOR OTHERS TO *FIND* THE ANSWER TO LIFE... IT DOES NOT *SEEK THEM*.



SECONDLY, YOU MUST NEVER BE *UNFAITHFUL* TO ME. IF YOU SHOULD EVER *DO SO*, THE RETRIBUTION OF THE *HERMITS* WILL FALL UPON YOU.



IT IS OUR CUSTOM TO BESTOW *TWO WEDDING GIFTS* UPON HIM WHO BECOMES A *MATE* OF LIFE. ONE IS OF *OUR CHOOSING*, AND THE OTHER IS OF YOUR OWN. *THINK ABOUT IT* AND CHOOSE *CAREFULLY*.



I AM FREE TO CHOOSE **ANYTHING**, AND YOU ARE BOUND TO GIVE IT TO ME?

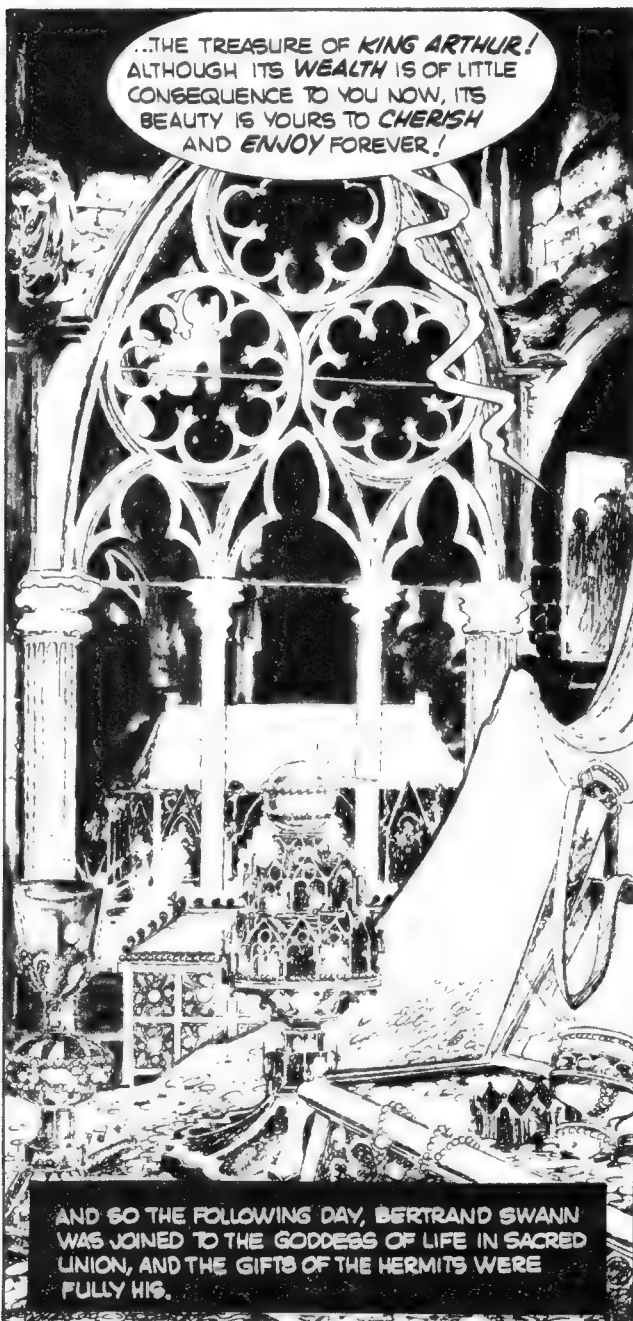
THAT IS TRUE. SO TAKE **CARE** THAT IT IS NOT **WASTED**.

THEN MY CHOICE IS **MADE!**



I WANT YOUR SOLEMN VOW THAT **WHATEVER** HAPPENS, THE HERMITS SHALL NEVER INFLICT **DEATH** UPON ME!

I SEE YOU REJOICE IN YOUR OWN **CLEVERNESS**, SWANN. VERY WELL, THE GIFT IS GIVEN **FREELY**. YOU **HAVE** YOUR VOW. AND NOW FOR THE GIFT OF **OUR** CHOOSING...



...THE TREASURE OF **KING ARTHUR!** ALTHOUGH ITS **WEALTH** IS OF LITTLE CONSEQUENCE TO YOU NOW, ITS BEAUTY IS YOURS TO **CHERISH** AND **ENJOY** FOREVER!

AND SO THE FOLLOWING DAY, BERTRAND SWANN WAS JOINED TO THE GODDESS OF LIFE IN SACRED UNION, AND THE GIFTS OF THE HERMITS WERE FULLY HIS.



THEIR LIFE TOGETHER WAS ONE OF UNIMAGINABLE BLISS. THEY **ENJOYED** THE RICH ORCHARDS AND GARDENS ALONG THE ABBEY GROUNDS. THEY ENJOYED THE BEAUTY OF ARTHUR'S TREASURE. THEY ENJOYED EACH OTHER'S **LOVE**...
...AND THE KNOWLEDGE THAT ALL THIS WAS **UNENDING**.



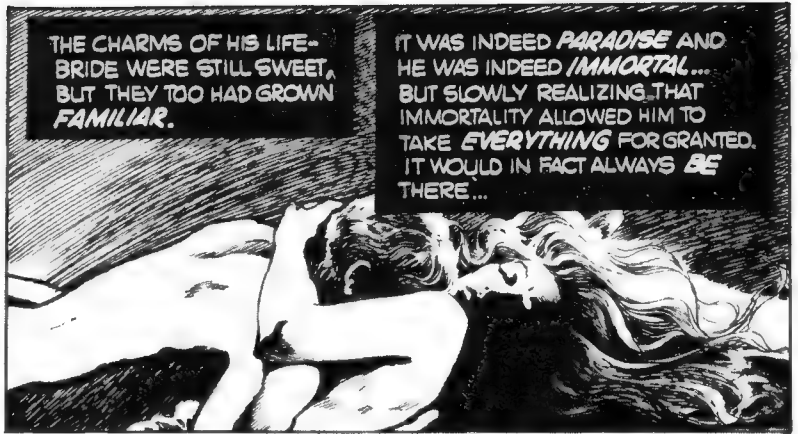
BUT NOT **ALL** DOUBTS WERE TOTALLY DISPELLED.

ONE THING STILL BOTHERS ME. WITH THE **FREEDOM** TO CHOOSE ETERNAL **HAPPINESS**, WHY DID ALL THOSE MEN **BEFORE** ME CHOOSE **DEATH**?

YEARS PASSED, AND ALL *WITHOUT* THE ABBEY WITHERED AND AGED, WHILE THAT WITHIN STAYED YOUTHFUL AND FRESH. BUT BERTRAND SWANN WAS NOT *CONTENT*. THE RICH GARDENS AND ORCHARDS WERE INDEED *BEAUTIFUL*, BUT IN THESE YEARS, SWANN SAW NOTHING BUT *THEM* AND THE WALLS OF THE RUINED *ABBEY*.

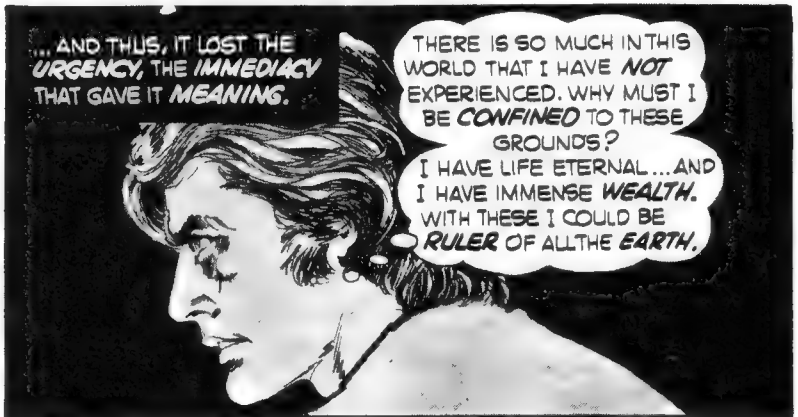


THE CHARMS OF HIS LIFE-BRIDE WERE STILL SWEET, BUT THEY TOO HAD GROWN *FAMILIAR*.



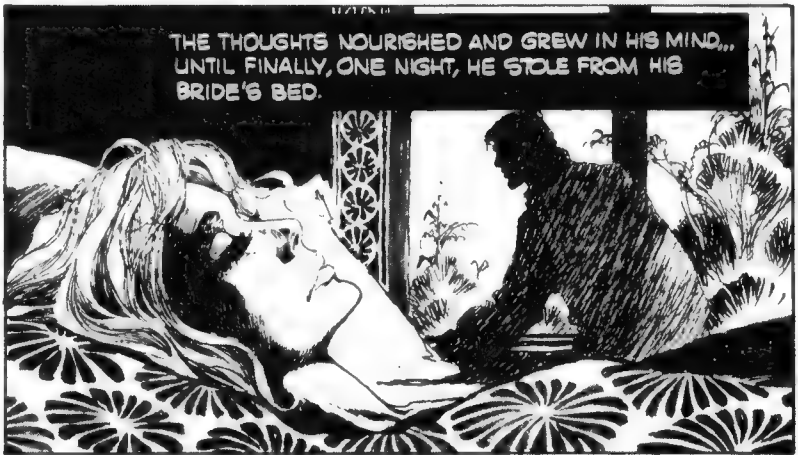
IT WAS INDEED *PARADISE* AND HE WAS INDEED *IMMORTAL*... BUT SLOWLY REALIZING THAT IMMORTALITY ALLOWED HIM TO TAKE *EVERYTHING* FOR GRANTED. IT WOULD IN FACT ALWAYS *BE* THERE...

... AND THUS, IT LOST THE *URGENCY*, THE *IMMEDIACY* THAT GAVE IT *MEANING*.

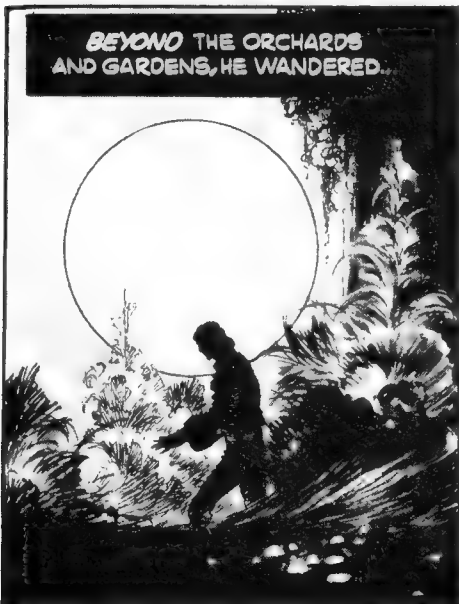


THERE IS SO MUCH IN THIS WORLD THAT I HAVE *NOT* EXPERIENCED. WHY MUST I BE *CONFINED* TO THESE GROUNDS? I HAVE LIFE ETERNAL... AND I HAVE IMMENSE *WEALTH*. WITH THESE I COULD BE *RULER* OF ALL THE *EARTH*.

THE THOUGHTS NOURISHED AND GREW IN HIS MIND... UNTIL FINALLY, ONE NIGHT, HE STOLE FROM HIS BRIDE'S BED.



BEYOND THE ORCHARDS AND GARDENS, HE WANDERED.

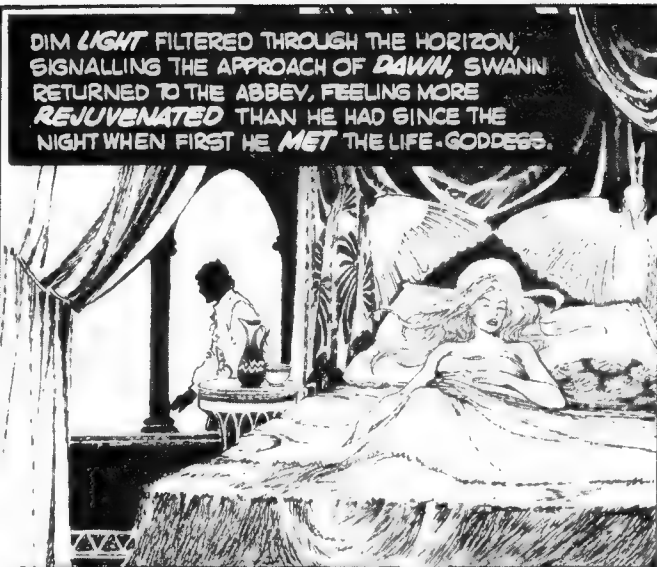


...AND FINALLY DOWN TO THE VILLAGE BELOW, DETERMINED TO SAMPLE THE PLEASURES OF THE WORLD *BEYOND* THE ABBEY. AND *TEMPTING* PLEASURES THEY WERE.



HE FELT A BIT LIKE *EVE*, TASTING OF FORBIDDEN FRUIT. BUT HOW COULD HE BE *PUNISHED*, FOR THE HERMITS HAD GIVEN THEIR *VOW* THAT HE SHOULD NEVER KNOW DEATH.

DIM LIGHT FILTERED THROUGH THE HORIZON, SIGNALLING THE APPROACH OF *DAWN*. SWANN RETURNED TO THE ABBEY, FEELING MORE *REJUVENATED* THAN HE HAD SINCE THE NIGHT WHEN FIRST HE *MET* THE LIFE-GODDESS.



THERE WAS A WIDE, FRUITFUL WORLD OUT THERE TO BE ENJOYED. AND DESPITE HIS IMPOSED MARRIAGE CONDITION, HE COULD SAMPLE IT WITH IMPUNITY, FOR *DEATH* WAS POWERLESS TO HARM HIM.

TOMORROW, HE WOULD TAKE ARTHUR'S *TREASURE* AND SEE *MORE* OF THAT WORLD.



SO, MY LOVE. YOU ARE LIKE THE *OTHERS*. YOU ARE NOT *CONTENT* WITH THE GOOD THINGS THAT HAVE BEEN GIVEN YOU.

NO. NOT WHEN I KNOW THERE IS SO MUCH MORE BEAUTY... SO MUCH MORE *PLEASURE* WAITING TO BE TAKEN.



BESIDES, YOU CANNOT DO TO *ME* WHAT YOU DID TO THE *OTHERS*. THE HERMITS HAVE *PROMISED* THAT NO MATTER *WHAT*, I SHOULD NEVER ENDURE *DEATH*... EVEN *YOU* CAN NOT MAKE THEM RENEG THAT!



BUT, MY FOOLISH LOVE... *DEATH* IS ONLY A *MEANS* TO AN END. A MEANS BY WHICH AN OBJECT PASSES FROM *LIFE* TO *NON-LIFE*.

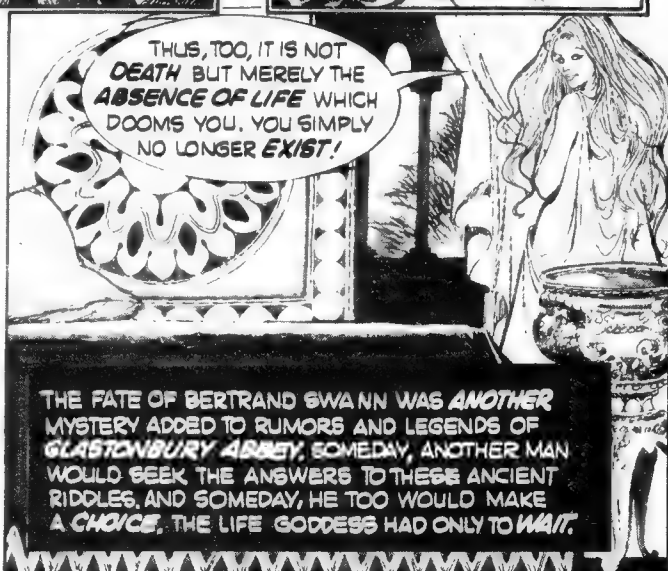
THE FACT THAT SOMETHING IS *NOT ALIVE* DOESN'T NECESSARILY MEAN IT IS *DEAD*. IT MAY MEAN SIMPLY THAT IT DOESN'T *EXIST*.



IT IS *TRUE* *DEATH* CANNOT HARM YOU. BUT YOU HAVE BROKEN THE CONDITION I PLACED UPON YOU...! YOU HAVE *SINNED* AGAINST *LIFE*, AND *THUS*, LIKE ADAM AND EVE, YOU ARE *EXPELLED* FROM PARADISE.



THUS, TOO, IT IS NOT *DEATH* BUT MERELY THE *ABSENCE OF LIFE* WHICH DOOMS YOU. YOU SIMPLY NO LONGER *EXIST*!



THE FATE OF BERTRAND SWANN WAS *ANOTHER* MYSTERY ADDED TO RUMORS AND LEGENDS OF *GLASTONBURY ABBEY*. SOMEDAY, ANOTHER MAN WOULD SEEK THE ANSWERS TO THESE ANCIENT RIDDLES, AND SOMEDAY, HE TOO WOULD MAKE A *CHOICE*. THE LIFE GODDESS HAD ONLY TO *WAIT*.

THE **PROFESSIONAL** RECHECKED THE **CONTENTS** OF THE SLIM BLACK VALISE CAREFULLY, THEN SNAPPED SHUT THE METAL STUDS WITH A TIGHT **SMILE**.



HE TURNED TO THE OVAL MIRROR ABOVE HIS BUREAU AND DEEPENED THE TUCK ON HIS **EXPENSIVE** SILK TIE, FINGERS MOVING WITH PRACTICED EASE, EYES CAREFULLY SCRUTINIZING HIS **NEATLY** COMBED HAIR. HE PAUSED ONLY LONG ENOUGH TO FRESHEN THE STRONG **MUSKY** SCENT OF HIS AFTERSHAVE.



HE RAN A WHISK BROOM BRISKLY ACROSS HIS **NEWLY** PRESSED SUIT, GRABBED THE HOUSE KEYS OFF THE COFFEE TABLE AND STEPPED INTO THE **WARM** SPRING SUN OF SANTA MIRA CALIFORNIA.



HE TOOK A DEEP BREATH. HE **GRINNED**. A ROBIN DIPPED LOW OVER THE SHAKE-SHINGLE ROOFS, PAST THE **CAREFULLY** PRUNNED ROWS OF SHRUBBERY, ARROWING DOWN THE ALIBASTER LENGTH OF SIDEWALK BEFORE HIM. HIS SMILE **WIDENED**, SHOWING TWIN ROWS OF **SPARKLING** WHITE, PERFECTLY EVEN TEETH. IT WAS A **BEAUTIFUL** NEW DAY. IT WAS A **BEAUTIFUL** NEIGHBORHOOD. IT WOULD BE A **BEAUTIFUL** NEW **BEGINNING**...

THE Professional



THE PROFESSIONAL WENT TO **WORK**....!



THE **FIRST** HOUSE ON HIS **LIST** BELONGED TO THE KETCHUMS. IT WAS IN THE TWO HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLAR RANGE. THAT WAS **GOOD**. MRS. KETCHUM WAS ROUGHLY FORTY - TWO YEARS OLD, FAIRLY ATTRACTIVE, NON-WORKING, **WITHOUT** CHILDREN. MR. KETCHUM WORKED **ALL** DAY. THAT WAS **GOOD TOO**.



MRS. KETCHUM WAS **BORED** WITH HOUSE WORK. SHE LIKED TO MARKET EARLY AND WATCH THE SOAP OPERAS IN THE AFTERNOON. THAT WAS WHY HE PICKED **HER** HOUSE **FIRST**.

YES? WHO IS IT?

GOOD MORNING MRS. KETCHUM. **LOVELY** DAY ISN'T IT? MY NAME IS **PETER GRANT**... I'M WITH REVEL GROOMING. MAY I HAVE A **MOMENT** OF YOUR TIME?



WELL... I'M **REALLY** NOT **DRESSED**! PERHAPS ANOTHER TIME--

WOULD YOU JUST **LOOK** AT THOSE CLOUDS? **CUMULONIMBUS**. **MARVELOUS**! REMINDS YOU OF THE SPRING DAYS OF YOUR **CHILDHOOD**, DOESN'T IT? AND SMELL THAT **AIR**...

YES... M-M-M! OUR **FIRST** REAL SPRING DAY! I **LOVE** THE SPRING! EVERYTHING IS SO... SO **FRESH** AND **ALIVE**!



A TIME TO BEGIN LIFE **ANEW**!

WHY, **YES**, I JUST PUT ON A POT. WOULD YOU **CARE** FOR A CUP, MR... MR...

OH!... THAT WOULDN'T BE **FRESH COFFEE** WOULD IT? (SNIF-SNIF!) I HAVEN'T HAD A CUP IN **WEEKS**-- ON THE GO SO MUCH, YOU UNDERSTAND. SMELLS **DELIGHTFUL**...!



...**GRANT. PETER GRANT**. I'D **LOVE** A CUP, THANK YOU. **MY**! THIS IS **LOVELY**! WHERE DID YOU **EVER** FIND A DECENT INTERIOR DECORATOR?

WHAT, **THIS**? **OH**, I DID IT **MYSELF**!

NO! BUT THIS IS **CHARMING**! YOU'RE A **PROFESSIONAL** THEN?



ME? **OH**, MY **NO**! I'M JUST A **HOUSEWIFE**!

I HOPE YOU DON'T MIND THE **CURLERS**, MR. GRANT. ONE LUMP OR TWO?

TWO. AND I'D **HARDLY** NOTICED.

OH! YOUR **DAUGHTER** PERHAPS?



WHY, **GRACIOUS**, MR. GRANT-- THAT'S **ME**! TAKEN ONLY **LAST YEAR**! OF COURSE, I HAD **MAKE-UP** ON THEN AND THESE **ROLLERS** OUT OF MY **HAIR**...!

AMAZING! BUT I WOULD HAVE **SWORN** ... YOU LOOK **ALMOST EXACTLY** LIKE ... LIKE--

FORGIVE ME... I'M **SORRY**...!

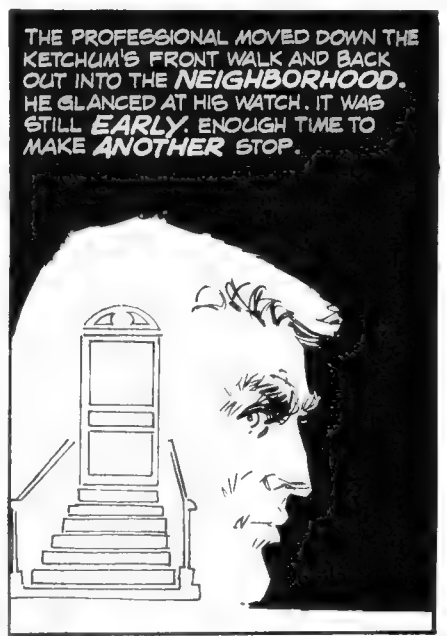


LIKE **WHOM**, MR. GRANT?

BUT... **WHY**?

MRS. KETCHUM... I REALIZE WE'VE ONLY **JUST** MET... BUT I WONDER IF YOU'D DO AN **ENORMOUS FAVOR** FOR ME? I WONDER IF YOU'D CONSIDER TAKING **DOWN** YOUR **HAIR**?





MRS. CORNWELL WAS A **WIDOW**. HER **THIRD** HUSBAND DIED ABRUPTLY, LEAVING HER WITH A TWENTY-THOUSAND DOLLAR INSURANCE POLICY. HER **FOURTH** HUSBAND DIED TRYING TO **SPEND** IT. MRS. CORNWELL RARELY LEFT HER EIGHT ROOM HOUSE NOW. SHE DIDN'T **TRUST** MEN. SHE **DID**, ON THE OTHER HAND, **TRUST** CATS...

TAISEY **LIKES** YOU, MR. GRANT. THAT'S **RARE**! AND TAISEY IS A FINE JUDGE OF CHARACTER!

MY LATE **WIFE** WAS QUITE FOND OF CATS, DID I MENTION?



AND MAY I SAY YOU REMIND ME VERY **MUCH** OF HER? IT'S NOT **EVERYONE** WHO CAN COMMUNICATE WITH CATS, YOU KNOW... **REALLY** COMMUNICATE....!

OH, MR. **GRANT**, THAT'S SO TRUE!



YOU'RE SURE THAT WILL BE **ENOUGH**, PETER? I HAVE PLENTY MORE...!

MRS. CARMICHAEL WAS AN ASPIRING ACTRESS. THOUGH SHE HADN'T ACHIEVED FURTHER STAGE SUCCESS SINCE A **WALK-ON** IN A JUNIOR HIGH ASSEMBLY, SHE WAS EVER HOPEFUL, EVER IN PREPARATION. HER HUSBAND WAS LESS ENTHUSIASTIC...!

... I WAS THE **SHORE**, PETER DARLING, AND YOU WERE THE **SEA**... POUNDING YOUR **WAVES** OF PASSION AGAINST MY RECKLESS BEACH AS I --

I WAS **WONDERING**, MARION... COULD YOU LEND ME A FEW DOLLARS...?



MRS. STILLWELL WAS PLAGUED BY A SERIES OF **REOCCURRING** YET ELUSIVELY UNDIAGNOSABLE DISEASES. THOUGH DOCTORS INSISTED SHE WAS PHYSICALLY **SOUND**, SHE REMAINED HAUNTED BY SUDDEN **ATTACKS** OF UNWARRANTED **VOMITING**... PARTICULARLY EVIDENT WHENEVER HER HUSBAND CLIMBED INTO BED...!

I FEEL **CLEAN**, DR. GRANT... I FEEL **PURIFIED** ... I FEEL THE WARM GLOW OF PERFECT HEALTH SPREADING UPWARD FROM MY --

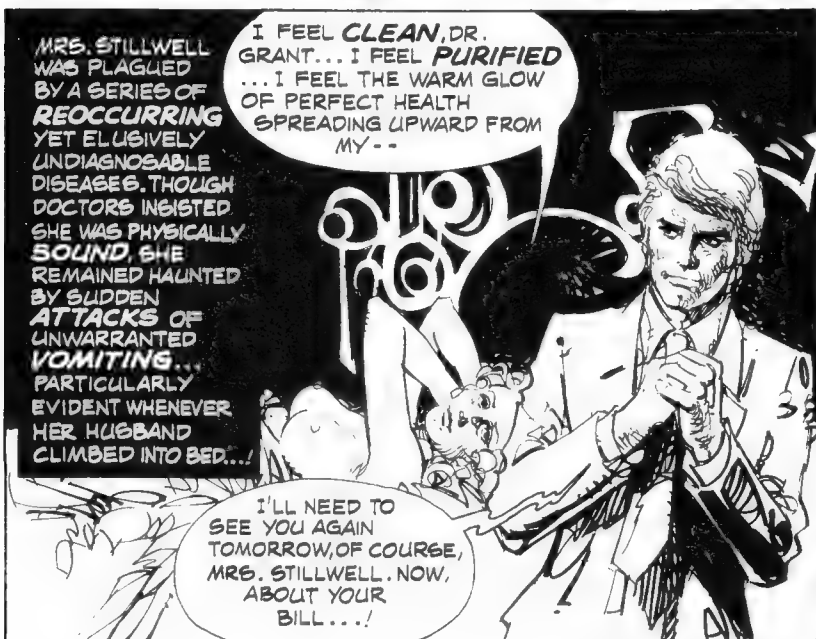
I'LL NEED TO SEE YOU AGAIN TOMORROW, OF COURSE, MRS. STILLWELL. NOW, ABOUT YOUR **BILL**...!

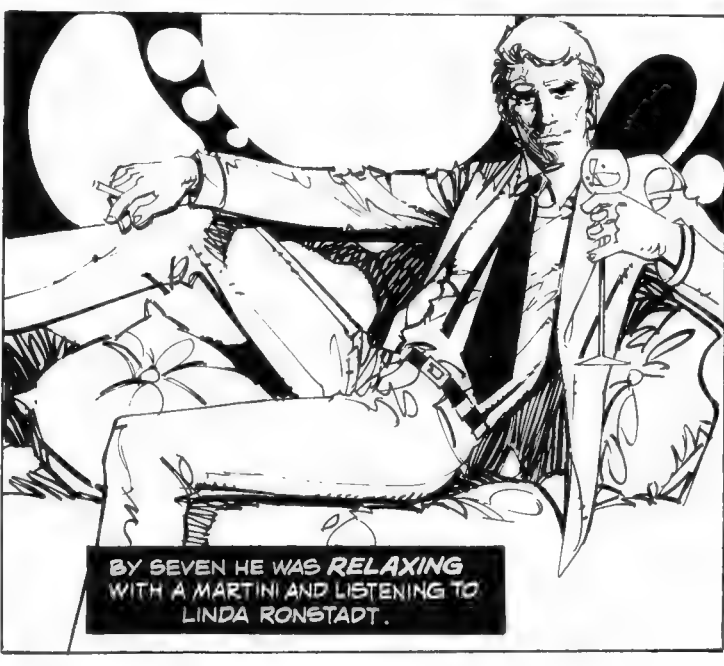
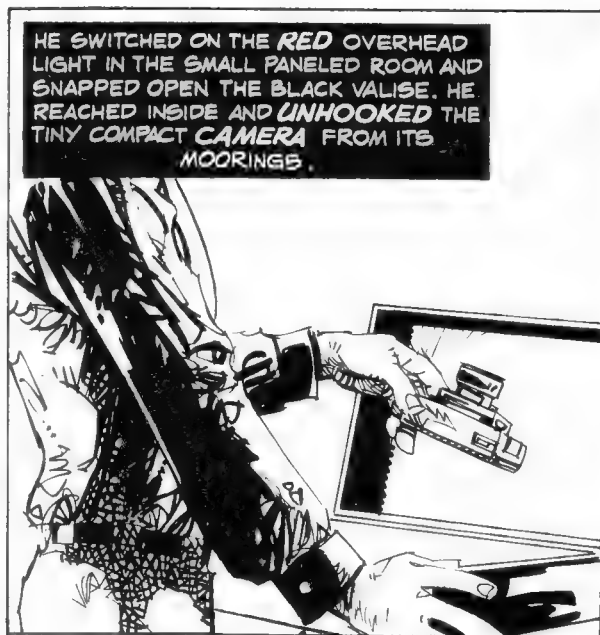
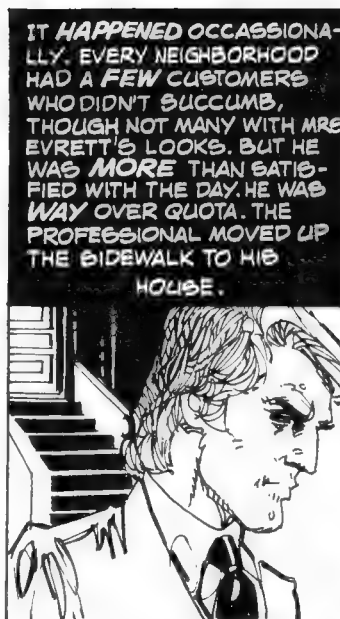
MRS. BARKLEY LOOKED **FAR OLDER** THAN HER FIFTY YEARS. MARRIED LIFE HAD WANED SHARPLY OVER THE DECADES, LEAVING ITS MARKS ETCHED WITH EVER INCREASING REGULARITY ON HER **HARRIED** FACE. SHE WAS **THIN**, ANEMIC -- EYES SUNKEN DEEPLY INTO HER --

YES? MAY I **HELP** YOU?

MRS. **BARKLEY**? I... I THOUGHT...

THE BARKLEYS **MOVED OUT** LAST WEEK. MY HUSBAND AND I OWN THE HOUSE NOW. WE'RE THE **EVRETT**S.







MRS. KETCHUM WAS THE FIRST TO BREAK...

I... I SIMPLY CAN'T AFFORD TO GIVE YOU ANY MORE, PETER. I HAVE ENJOYED OUR TIMES TOGETHER BUT... WELL, I THINK JOHN IS BEGINNING TO SUSPECT...!



SEE THAT HE DOESN'T.



YOU DISGUSTING, VILE, PERVERTED YOUNG --

I WANT ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS A DAY, VIVION...! YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO PILFER THAT FROM YOUR HUSBAND'S ACCOUNT WITHOUT HIM KNOWING IT.



MRS. FLETCHER WAS NEXT...

OH, MY GOD! WHAT AM I TO DO? WHAT AM I TO DO?

CUT DOWN ON CIGARETTES...!



I'M RUINED! RUINED! OH, WHAT BITTER FRUIT BEARS THE WEED OF UNCONSECRATED LOVE! OH SWEET REVENGE, WHERE IS THY STING? OH --

GOOD DAY, MARION.



PETER? DOES THIS MEAN WE CAN'T... CAN'T...

OH, SURE WE CAN. BUT IT'LL COST YOU AN EXTRA HUNDRED NOW.



THINGS WENT SMOOTHLY. ROUTINE SET IN. BY MID-JULY HE'D BOUGHT A NEW CAMARO AND STARTED LOOKING AROUND FOR A MORE EXPENSIVE HOME. THERE WERE A FEW UNEVEN MOMENTS, OF COURSE, BUT THEY NEVER LASTED LONG.

YOU'RE LATE ON YOUR LAST PAYMENT, SYLVIA.

PLEASE, PETER... CAN'T WE WORK SOMETHING OUT...?

IF YOU'RE LATE AGAIN, I'LL HAVE TO PENALIZE YOU. YOU WOULDN'T WANT THAT, WOULD YOU?

BY SEPTEMBER, HE'D GOTTEN **RID** OF THE CAMARO AND BOUGHT AN ALPHA ROMERO. HE WAS **STILL** LOOKING FOR A NEW HOUSE BUT THAT WAS BECOMING **LESS** OF A PROBLEM; THE FLETCHER'S, IT SEEMED, HAD DECIDED ABRUPTLY TO **MOVE** TO FLORIDA.

HE'D **PREDICTED** IT. MRS. FLETCHER WAS **NOT** A STRONG WOMAN. WHEN YOU CAME RIGHT DOWN TO IT **NO** WOMAN WAS **REALLY** STRONG. WOMEN IN GENERAL WERE **SHEEP**...WEAK AS A BUNCH OF --



AH, MR. GRANT, I'M MRS. EVRETT...REMEMBER? ...AND YOU **KNOW** THESE LADIES.

WE'VE BEEN WAITING TO GIVE YOU SOMETHING.

A **PRESENT** FOR YOU, MR. GRANT, FROM THE **WIVES** OF SANTA MIRA. IT CONTAINS THE **ASHES** OF **ALL** THE PHOTOS YOU'VE TAKEN IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD AS WELL AS THEIR **NEGATIVES**. YOU **REALLY** SHOULD KEEP YOUR DARK ROOM LOCKED, YOU KNOW.

HOW DID YOU GET IN?

WE GOT IN. AND WE'RE **ON** TO YOU, MR. GRANT--**ALL** OF US. VIVION CONFIDED IN ME ONE DAY. IT DIDN'T TAKE ME LONG TO DISCOVER YOUR **SORDID** LITTLE GAME.

I THINK IT'S TIME YOU **LEFT** SANTA MIRA, MR. GRANT.



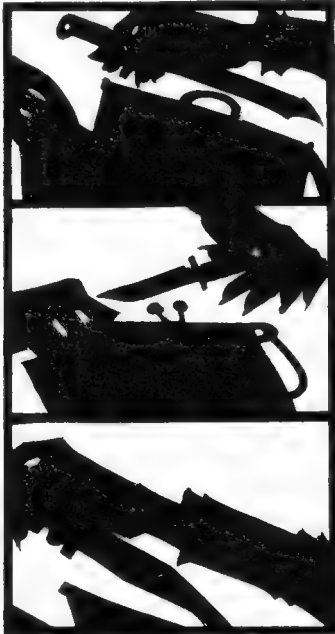
I CAN **STILL** MAKE PHONE CALLS... **STILL** TELL YOUR HUSBANDS ...



I'VE DONE SOME CHECKING ON YOU, MR. GRANT. YOU'VE COVERED YOUR TRACKS **WELL**... SO WELL THAT YOU'RE VIRTUALLY **WITHOUT** ANY **MEANINGFUL** IDENTIFICATION. EVEN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT DOESN'T KNOW WHERE YOU ARE. I THINK IT'S TIME YOU **LEFT** SANTA MIRA, MR. GRANT...



...PERMANENTLY!





MRS. CORNWELL DELIVERED THE **FIRST** THRUST. IT WAS FROM THE BACK AND RATHER **CLUMSILY** EXECUTED...!



MRS. STILLWELL'S BLADE WAS **CLEANER**, YET FAR FROM **FATAL**...



ALL IN ALL, IT TOOK NEARLY **TEN MINUTES** FOR HIM TO DIE... MOST OF THE WOMEN CONCENTRATED MORE ON THE **GROIN AREA** THAN ANY OF THE **VITAL ORGANS**...



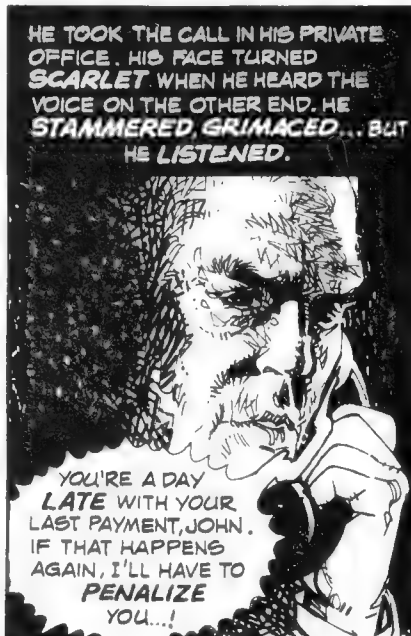
THIS FALLETH **CAESAR**! SO IT SHALL BE WITH ALL **TYRANTS** WHO--

C'MON, MARION! LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!



THAT AFTERNOON, MR. KETCHUM WAS INTERRUPTED AT AN IMPORTANT BUSINESS MEETING BY HIS SECRETARY. HE WAS **DISGRUNTLED**. HE DIDN'T LIKE BEING INTERRUPTED...

THERE'S AN **URGENT PHONE** CALL FOR YOU, MR. KETCHUM!



HE TOOK THE CALL IN HIS PRIVATE OFFICE. HIS FACE TURNED **SCARLET** WHEN HE HEARD THE VOICE ON THE OTHER END. HE **STAMMERED GRIMACED**... BUT HE **LISTENED**.

YOU'RE A DAY **LATE** WITH YOUR LAST PAYMENT, JOHN. IF THAT HAPPENS AGAIN, I'LL HAVE TO **PENALIZE** YOU...!



MRS. EVRETT HUNG UP. SHE PICKED UP HER MARTINI AND SAT BACK DOWN BESIDE THE STEREO. **ROUTINE** WAS SETTING IN AGAIN. THINGS WERE GOING **SMOOTHLY** ONCE MORE. IN A MONTH SHE'D HAVE THAT NEW MINK STOLE SHE WANTED. BUSINESS WAS **GOOD**.

THE PROFESSIONAL SETTLED BACK IN HER EASY CHAIR AND **SMILED**.

END

MY TALE IS **NOT** UNCOMMON. DOUBT-
LESS, IT IS ONE YOU HAVE HEARD BEFORE
...IN VARIED FORMS WITH UNFLAWED
PREDICTABILITY.

IT SPEAKS OF **LIFE** AND **DEATH**,
OF **HATE** AND **VENGEANCE** AND
MAN'S INHUMANITY TO THOSE HE LOVES
MOST.

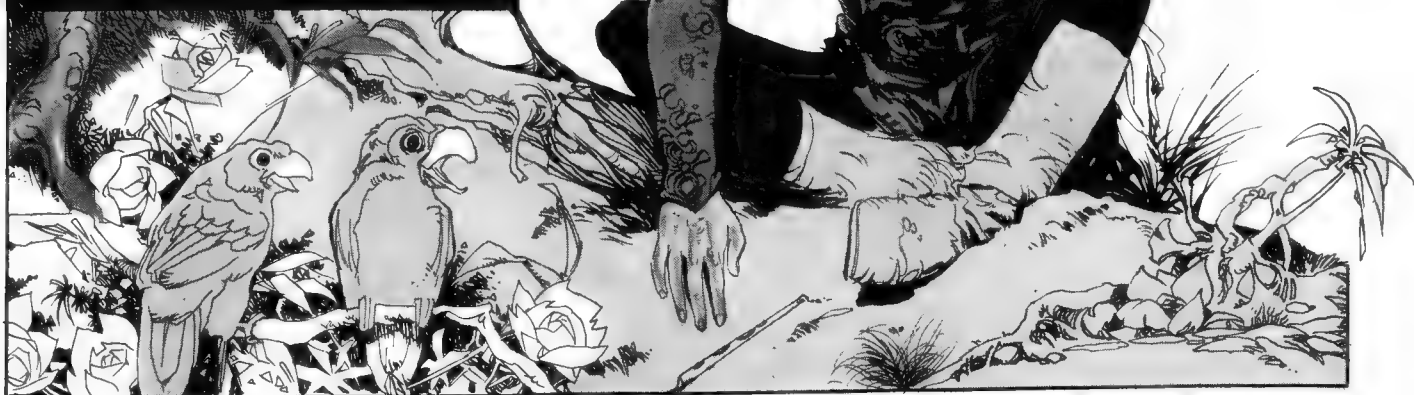
I HAVE **LIVED** MY TALE AGAIN AND
AGAIN, IN REPEATED NARRATION TO THE
SQUIRRELS, THE RABBITS AND THE FOR-
EST BIRDS.



THEY ARE ALL THAT **REMAIN**,
LENDING COURTEOUS EAR TO A
BROKEN, SADDENED, SHADOW OF
A MAN.

WINGS of Vengeance!

THE **BIRDS**. LISTEN BEST. THEY SEEM FAS-
CINATED AT EACH NEW TELLING OF MY STORY.
FOR THEY, PEACEABLE, CHEERFUL, MOST BEAU-
TEOUS AND INNOCENT OF NATURE'S CREATIONS,
CANNOT **UNDERSTAND** WHY MEN, WITH ALL
THEIR ABILITY, ALL THEIR INTELLIGENCE, ALWAYS
ASPIRE TO MALEVOLENT **SAVAGERY**.



MY TALE IS A NIGHTMARE, **HAUNTING** DARK-SOME NIGHTS, **SHADOWING** SIGHTLESS DAYS. I RELATE IT OVER AND OVER BECAUSE I CANNOT **FORGET**. I CANNOT **ESCAPE** THE DARK, OBSESSIVE PAST.

I TELL MY WOE TO THE FOREST'S CREATURES FOR TO THEM ALONE AM I ALLOWED TO SPEAK, I HAVE NOT CONVERSED WITH A **MAN** SINCE I WAS BANISHED FROM MY FATHER'S FEIFDOM, ERE SO LONG AGO.

AND YET, IF PUNISHMENT FOR MY CRIME WERE SIMPLE **BANISHMENT**, MY TUMULTUOUS MEMORIES MIGHT **QUELL** AND **QUIET** AS A GENTLING FOREST BROOK.

INSTEAD, MY GUILT **RAGES** LIKE A THUNDEROUS STORM. AND I AM MADE CEASELESSLY BEREFT BY THE **DEATH** OF ONE SO INNOCENT AND FAIR.

YOU ASK HOW THE FATES **ACCURSED** ME SO, FRIEND SPARROW?

LISTEN THEN, AND I WILL TELL YOU **ALL**...OF A LOVE UNBLEMISHED AND OF BETRAYAL MOST FOUL.

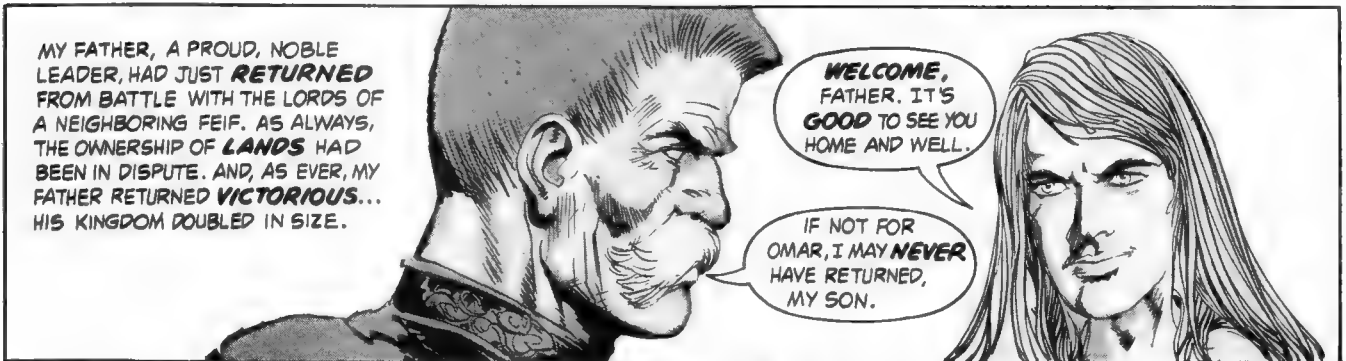
BUT FORGIVE ME IF I DO NOT **FINISH** MY TALE, LITTLE FRIENDS...

...FOR OFTEN, THE **SIGHT** OF HER...MY LOVE MOST TRUE, TREADING SOFTLY THROUGH THE SHADOWS OF MY DREAMS, IS MORE THAN I CAN **BEAR**.



ONCE, I WAS A **HANDSOME** MAN. **SOME** SAID MY EYES WERE THE COLOR OF THE HEAVENS ON A WONDEROUS SUMMER'S DAY.

OTHERS CLAIMED MY FEATURES **TOO** FAIR AND FLAWLESS... **UNMANLY** FOR THE SON OF A FEUDAL BARON.



MY FATHER, A PROUD, NOBLE LEADER, HAD JUST **RETURNED** FROM BATTLE WITH THE LORDS OF A NEIGHBORING FEIF. AS ALWAYS, THE OWNERSHIP OF **LANDS** HAD BEEN IN DISPUTE. AND, AS EVER, MY FATHER RETURNED **VICTORIOUS**... HIS KINGDOM DOUBLED IN SIZE.

WELCOME, FATHER. IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU HOME AND WELL.

IF NOT FOR OMAR, I MAY **NEVER** HAVE RETURNED, MY SON.



HIS SHARP EYE AND SKILLED BLADE **SAVED** ME FROM THE SWORDS OF THREE MURDEROUS BARBARIANS.

IT'S **WELL** YOU HAD OMAR AT YOUR SIDE, FATHER.

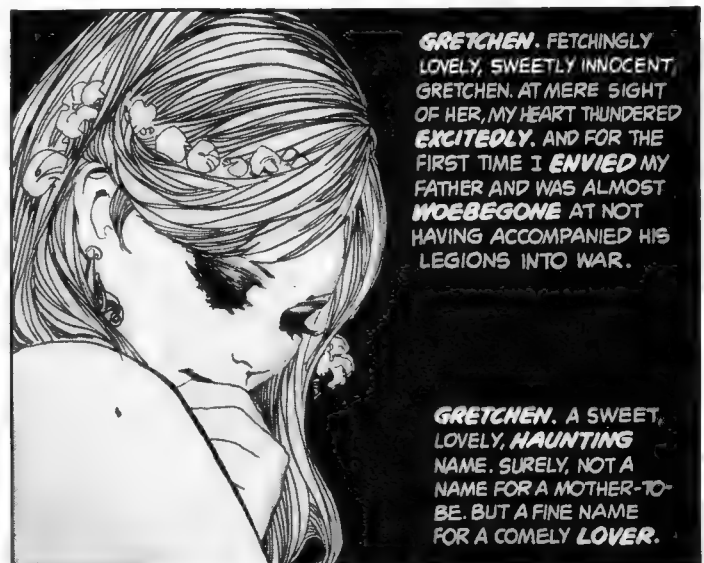
RATHER **MY SON** HAD BEEN THERE IN HIS STEAD. BUT MY SON PREFERS THE COMPANY OF **BIRDS** TO **MEN**.

YOU AND I ARE **DIFFERENT**, FATHER. BUT **NEVER** WILL THAT EFFECT MY **LOVE** FOR YOU.



COME! SEE THE **SPOILS** THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN **YOURS** HAD YOU ACCOMPANIED YOUR FATHER INTO BATTLE.

THIS IS **FAIR** **GRETCHEN**, A PRIZE FROM THE DEFEATED DUCHY. SOON, I WILL TAKE HER FOR MY **WIFE**.



GRETCHEN. FETCHINGLY LOVELY, SWEETLY INNOCENT, **GRETCHEN**. AT MERE SIGHT OF HER, MY HEART THUNDERED **EXCITEDLY**. AND FOR THE FIRST TIME I **ENVIED** MY FATHER AND WAS ALMOST **WOEBEGONE** AT NOT HAVING ACCOMPANIED HIS LEGIONS INTO WAR.

GRETCHEN. A SWEET, LOVELY, **HAUNTING** NAME. SURELY, NOT A NAME FOR A MOTHER-TO-BE. BUT A FINE NAME FOR A COMELY **LOVER**.



IN THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED, MY FATHER TENDED TO DUTIES LONG-NEGLECTED. FAIR GRETCHEN WAS ALLOWED FREEDOM TO EXPLORE THE FEUDAL LANDS OVER WHICH SHE WOULD SOON BE **BARONESS**.



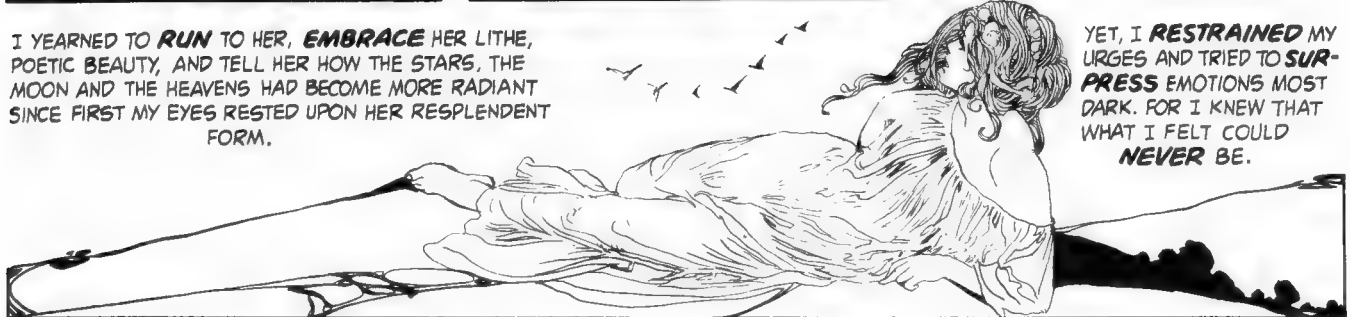
I KNEW MY FATHER **ACHED** TO TAKE GRETCHEN FOR HIS WIFE. HE HAD NOT KNOWN THE **CARESS** OF A WOMAN SINCE THE DREAD FEVER CLAIMED MY **MOTHER**, WHILE YET I WAS A BOY.

I HAD NO WISH TO **BETRAY**... TO **HURT** MY BELOVED FATHER. AND YET, I COULD NOT **STOP** MYSELF FROM **PERSUADING** HIS LOVELY GRETCHEN INTO OUR SHELTERING CEDAR GARDEN.



TAKING CARE NOT TO BE **SEEN**, I WATCHED IN SILENT ADMIRATION AS BEAUTIFUL GRETCHEN **DANCED** UNINHIBITEDLY IN THE WONDEROUS SPRING SUN, BLOOMING LIKE A FLOWER FAIR, WITH **HAPPINESS** AND **LOVE**.

I YEARNED TO **RUN** TO HER, **EMBRACE** HER LITHE, POETIC BEAUTY, AND TELL HER HOW THE STARS, THE MOON AND THE HEAVENS HAD BECOME MORE RADIANT SINCE FIRST MY EYES RESTED UPON HER RESPLENDENT FORM.



YET, I **RESTRAINED** MY URGES AND TRIED TO **SUPPRESS** EMOTIONS MOST DARK. FOR I KNEW THAT WHAT I FELT COULD **NEVER** BE.



AS I WATCHED, **HIDING** AND **ASHAMED** OF FEELINGS I COULD NOT CONTROL, I NOTICED IN GRETCHEN'S EYES A **SADNESS** THAT SHOULD NOT HAVE ENSHADOWED ONE SO BEAUTIFUL AND FAIR.

AWKWARDLY... BRAVELY... I **ABANDONED** MY PLACE OF COVER AND **WENT** TO HER... TO **CONSOLE** HER DOUBTLESS SORROWS.



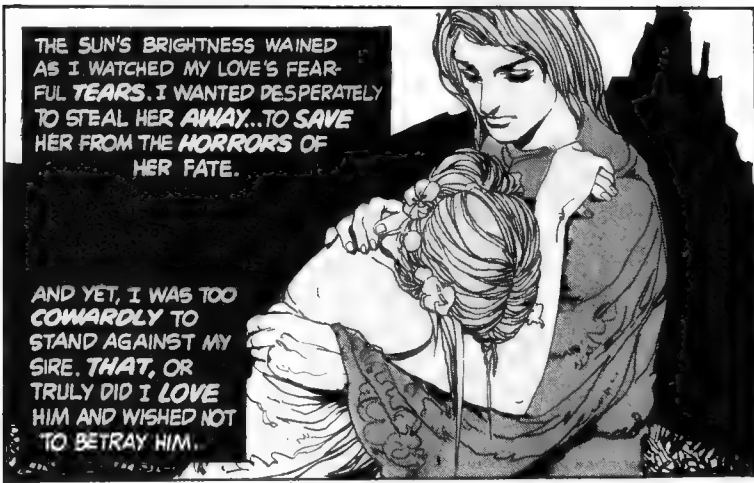
SHE WELCOMED MY ARMS EAGERLY, AND RELATED HER **CONTEMPT** FOR THE MAN WHO HAD SLAIN HER SIRE, STOLEN HER FROM THE ONLY HOME SHE HAD KNOWN, AND NOW, WAS FORCING HER INTO **UNWANTED MATRIMONY**.

TO SHARE A **BED** WITH THE MAN WHO HAD **MURDERED** HER FATHER, WAS DARKSOME AND TERRIBLE.



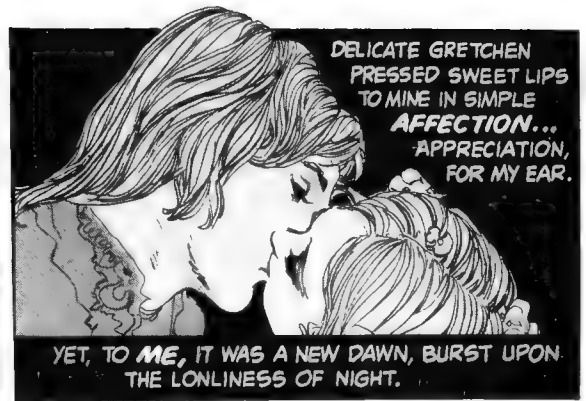
GRETCHEN TREMBLED AS SHE TOLD OF THE **HORRORS** SHE HAD ENDURED AT THE HANDS OF MY FATHER. SHE SENSED IN ME A TRUSTED **ALLY**, EVER-PRESENT WITH A SYMPATHETIC EAR... AN UNDERSTANDING SMILE.

I DARED NOT TELL HER MY FEELINGS WERE **MORE** THAN SYMPATHY.



THE SUN'S BRIGHTNESS WAINED AS I WATCHED MY LOVE'S FEARFUL **TEARS**. I WANTED DESPERATELY TO STEAL HER **AWAY...TO SAVE** HER FROM THE **HORRORS** OF HER FATE.

AND YET, I WAS TOO **COWARDLY** TO STAND AGAINST MY SIRE. **THAT**, OR TRULY DID I **LOVE** HIM AND WISHED NOT TO BETRAY HIM.



DELICATE GRETCHEN PRESSED SWEET LIPS TO MINE IN SIMPLE **AFFECTION...** APPRECIATION, FOR MY EAR.

YET, TO **ME**, IT WAS A NEW DAWN, BURST UPON THE LONLINESS OF NIGHT.



SUDDENLY, TO HORROR, MY **FATHER** SPRANG FROM THE DENSE WOODED GROVE, AT THE HEAD OF SIX ARMED WARRIORS.

SO! THE SON **LUSTS** FOR HIS MOTHER-TO-BE!



FATHER! **NO!** IT'S NOT WHAT YOU **THINK!**

I CAN SEE WHAT IT IS, MY PRETTY FACED BOY! I TRUDGE TO WAR... YOU CLAIM THE SPOILS.



MY BETHROTHED! **PLEASE!** THERE IS **NOTHING** BETWEEN THE YOUTH AND I.

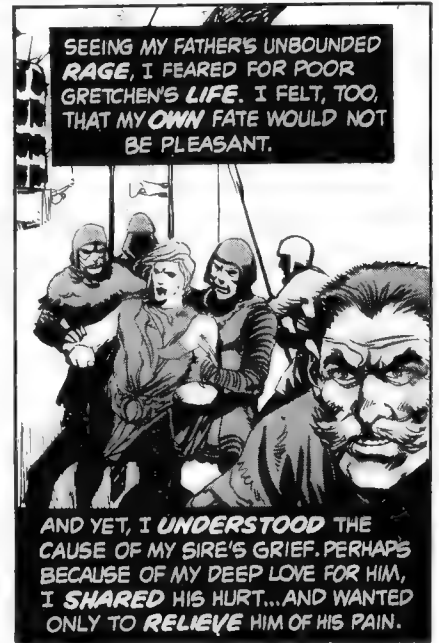
I REMAIN **UNSPOILED**, MY LIEGE. I HAVE **SAVED** MYSELF FOR OUR WEDDING NIGHT.



THERE WILL BE **NO** WEDDING FOR YOU, WENCH.

TAKE THEM TO THE **HEADSMAN!**

FATHER! YOU CAN'T!



SEEING MY FATHER'S UNBOUNDED **RAGE**, I FEARED FOR POOR GRETCHEN'S **LIFE**. I FELT, TOO, THAT MY **OWN** FATE WOULD NOT BE PLEASANT.

AND YET, I **UNDERSTOOD** THE CAUSE OF MY SIRE'S GRIEF. PERHAPS BECAUSE OF MY DEEP LOVE FOR HIM, I **SHARED** HIS HURT...AND WANTED ONLY TO **RELIEVE** HIM OF HIS PAIN.

I KNEW MY FATHER TO BE A **HARD** MAN. UNFORGIVING, COLD AND OFTEN CRUEL. YET, NEVER BEFORE HAD I WITNESSED THE **BOUNDS** OF HIS TRUCULENCE. WITH ME, HIS BELOVED SON, HE HAD ALWAYS **CURBED** HIS TEMPER...**CHECKED** HIS TONGUE.

SO YOU ARE **UNSPOILED**, MY FAITHFUL GRETCHEN?

HA! HA!
HA! NOT FOR LONG!

MY SKIN **WELTED** AND **WINCED** AT EACH DEADLY BLOW OF THE HEADSMAN'S METAL TIPPED WHIP. IT **TORE**, WITH EACH HIDEOUS CRACK, A GOUGE OF **FLESH** FROM VIRTUOUS GRETCHEN'S BACK.

STILL, SHE **CLUNG** DESPERATELY TO LIFE, NEVER CRYING OUT, SILENTLY PRAYING THAT MY FATHER WOULD **UNDERSTAND** AND **FORGIVE**...

P-PLEASE...

HE DID NOT!

INSTEAD, HE ORDERED THE HEADSMAN TO **SEAL** HER VIRTUES WITH THE **WHITE HOT IRON**. I SCREAMED IN HORROR AS MY LOVE'S FLESH **CRACKLED**, **BURNED** AND EMITTED THE FOUL STENCH OF **DEATH**.

SHE DID NOT **CRY** EVEN AS SHE ENTERED UNTO THE GATES OF **ETERNITY**.

No0000!

THEN, IN UNCONTROLLABLE **RAGE**, MY FATHER TOOK HIS SWORD AND **FLAILED** IT MERCILESSLY ABOUT MY FACE.

...UNTIL I JOINED MY GRETCHEN IN THE PEACEABLE SLEEP HEREAFTER.

BLOOD SPILLED FROM A GAPING **HOLE** WHERE ONCE MY NOSE HAD BEEN. FIRST ONE EYE, THEN THE OTHER, WAS RIPPED FROM ITS SOCKET. **TEETH**, BARED BY A MISSING LIP, **SPLINTERED** WITH EACH SUCCESSIVE BLOW.

YET NOW MY FATHER **FORCED** ME TO WATCH AS HIS MERCINARIES **STRIPPED** MY GRETCHEN OF HER GARB, AND BOUND HER WITH CHAINS, SHAMED HER WITH THEIR LAUGHING, LECHEROUS **JEERS**.

AGAIN, AGAIN. HE **STRUCK**...AND I PRAYED HE WOULD **NOT CEASE**...

NOT UNTIL MY FACE WAS RENDERED A FORMLESS, BLOODED MASS OF **GORE**, WAS MY FATHER'S RAGE **ABATED**.

YOUR PRETTY
FEATURES WILL NEVER
AGAIN **CONCEAL** YOUR
SOUL MOST FOUL.

LET ALL THOSE
WHO LOOK UPON YOU, KNOW
THAT YOU ARE AS **VILE**,
AS **SPOILED** AS
YOUR FACE!



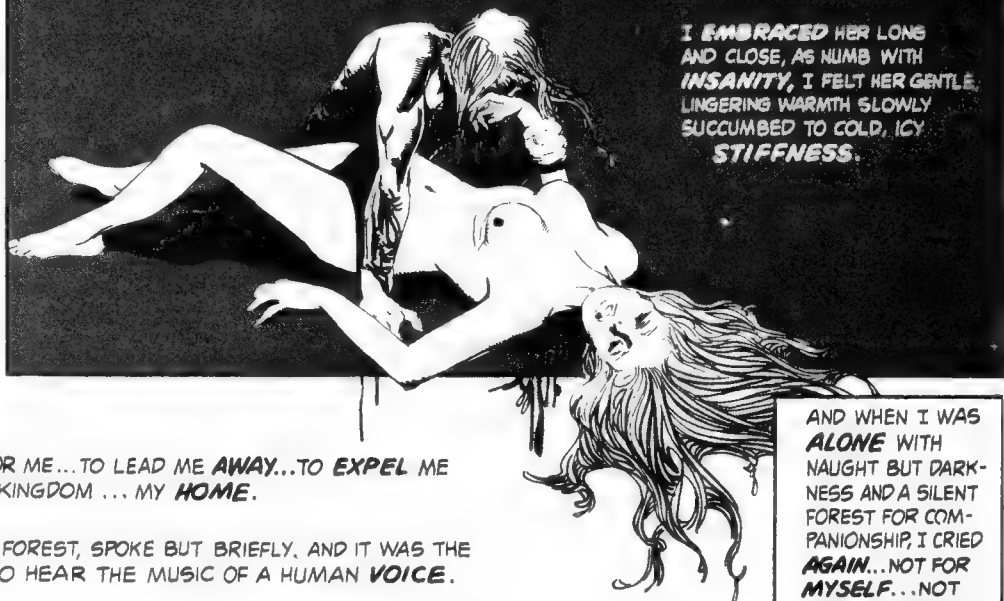
MY SIRE **LEFT** US THEN. **ALONE** IN THE DARKSOME
DUNGEON SMELLING OF **DEATH**
AND **HATE**.

SCARRED, DISFIGURED, BLINDED
THOUGH I WAS, MY THOUGHTS
FLOODED WITH CONCERN FOR
POOR, BROKEN **GRETCHEN**.



SOMEHOW, I **FOUND** HER STILLED,
VULNERABLE FORM IN THE DARKNESS.

DELICATELY, I **PULLED** HER TO MY
BREAST, FEELING HER GENTLE WARMTH,
AND HER LAST WATER-TINGED TRICKLING
OF BLOOD.



I **EMBRACED** HER LONG
AND CLOSE, AS NUMB WITH
INSANITY, I FELT HER GENTLE,
LINGERING WARMTH SLOWLY
SUCCUMBED TO COLD, ICY
STIFFNESS.

AFTER A TIME, THEY **CAME** FOR ME...TO LEAD ME **AWAY**...TO **EXPUL** ME
FOREVER FROM MY FATHER'S KINGDOM ... MY **HOME**.

THOSE WHO GUIDED ME TO THE FOREST, SPOKE BUT BRIEFLY, AND IT WAS THE
LAST TIME I WAS EVER TO HEAR THE MUSIC OF A HUMAN **VOICE**.

LET NO MAN **SEE**
YOU...NO MAN **SPEAK**
WITH YOU. FOR **IF** IT COMES
TO PASS, SURELY YOUR
FATHER WILL PUT THAT
MAN TO **DEATH**.



AND WHEN I WAS
ALONE WITH
NAUGHT BUT DARK-
NESS AND A SILENT
FOREST FOR COM-
PANIONSHIP, I CRIED
AGAIN...NOT FOR
MYSELF...NOT
FOR MY **FATHER**
WHO HAD BEEN SO
TRAGICALLY
WRONGED...!

MY TEARS WERE
FOR MY LOVE NOW
LOST...GENTLE,
INNOCENT
GRETCHEN.



GRETCHEN'S NIGHTMARE
FATE HAS **HAUNTED**
THE DARKNESS OF MY
DREAMS... CLUNG LIKE A
TALONED BEAST UPON
MY BACK... RENDERED
MY DARK DAYS EVEN
BLACKER.

I COULD NO MORE **FOR-
GET** MY BELOVED'S
HORRIBLE **DEATH** THAN
COULD I THE **LOVE** YET
LINGERING WITHIN MY
SOUL...

...LOVE FOR **HER**...
THE FAIREST, GENTLEST
CREATURE OF ALL.



AND NOW, EVEN NOW... I
REPEAT MY STORY
DAILY TO THE ONLY EARS
THAT WILL LISTEN.

I **RELIVE** MY TALE SO
THAT ONCE AGAIN GRETCHEN
MIGHT **LIVE**... AND LIGHT
THE BLACKNESS OF MY LIFE.



SOMEHOW... SOMEWAY, I
KNOW MY **WINGED COM-
PANIONS** HAVE UNDER-
STOOD MY TALE BEST. PER-
HAPS **THEY**, ABOVE ALL
OTHER CREATURES, UNDER-
STAND **LOVE** AND THE
BEAUTEIOUS WORLD IT
ENSHINES.

I SENSE SOMETHING **MORE**
IN MY FRIENDS ON WING... AN
ALMOST **UNEARTHLY**
FEELING. I CANNOT ESCAPE
THE BELIEF THAT SOMEHOW,
IF THEY HAD THE **POWER**,
MY FLEET, SOARING COM-
PANIONS WOULD **RIGHT**
THE INJUSTICE THAT HAS
BEEN COMMITTED.



THEY ARE SENSITIVE
CREATURES, DEEPLY
AFFECTED BY SENSELESS
SUFFERING. YET TOO, THEY
HAVE AN INNER STRENGTH
UNEXPECTED IN CREATURES
SO DELICATE.



YET THEY CANNOT TRULY UNDERSTAND
MY WORDS OR THE HORRORS I RELATE
TO THEM DAILY. IF THEY COULD, MY SOUL
WOULD CHILL AT THE THOUGHT OF
THEIR VENGEANCE.

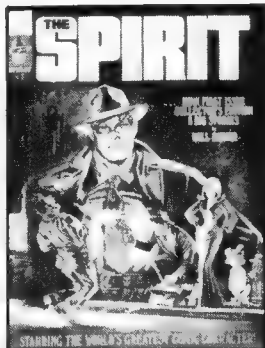


PERHAPS
IT IS WELL
THEY CAN-
NOT COM-
PREHEND THE
SORROWS
OF MEN!

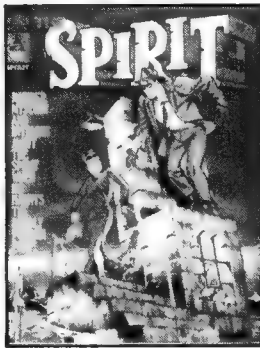
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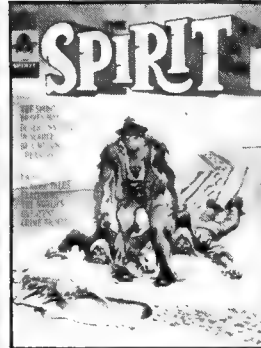
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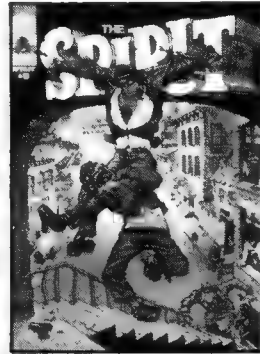
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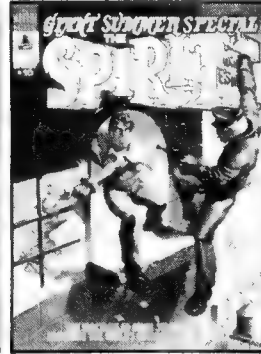
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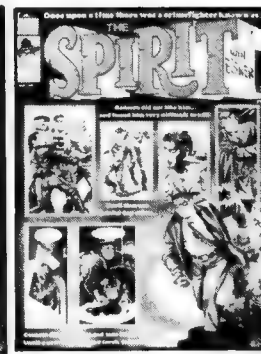
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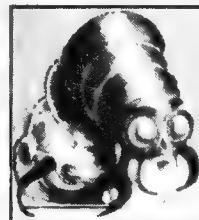
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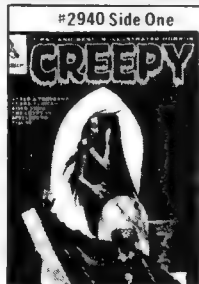
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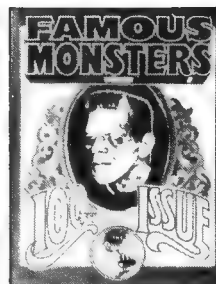


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FEET
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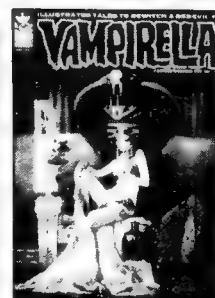
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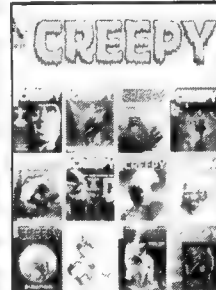
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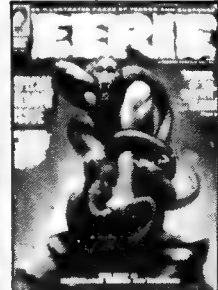
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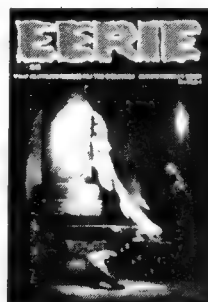
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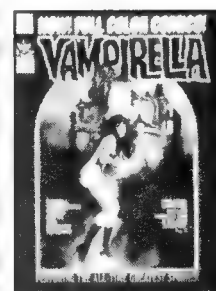
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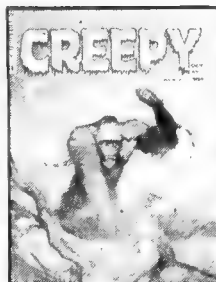
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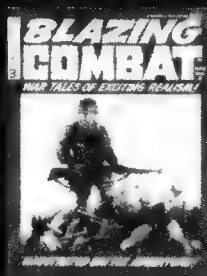
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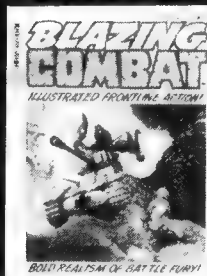
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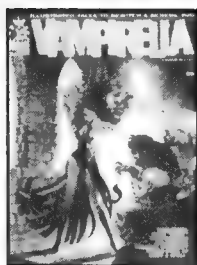
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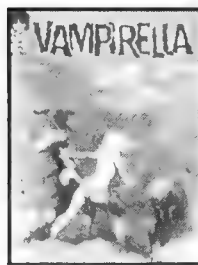
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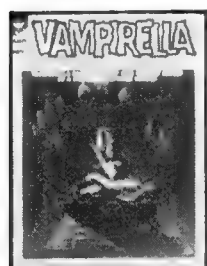
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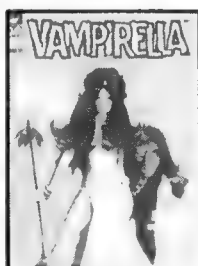
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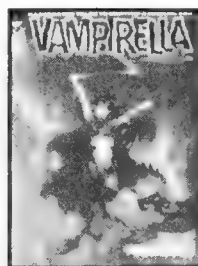
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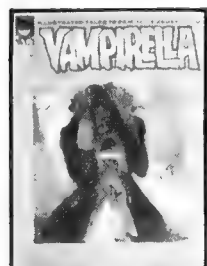
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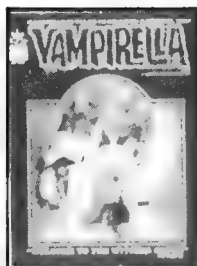
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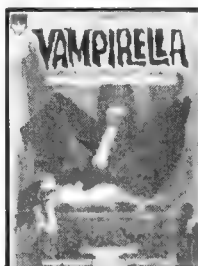
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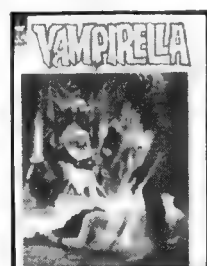
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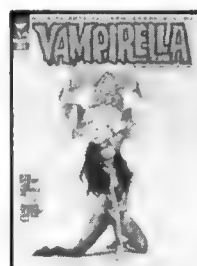
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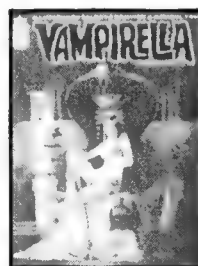
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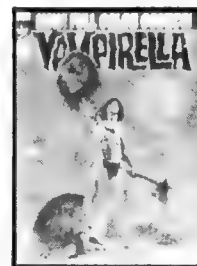
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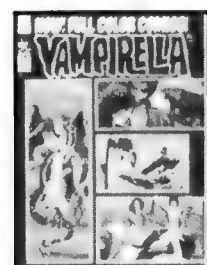
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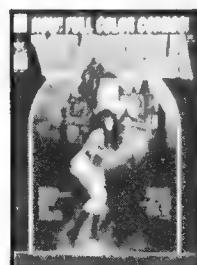
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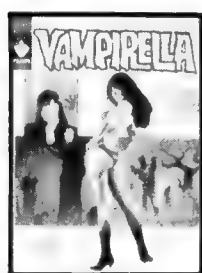
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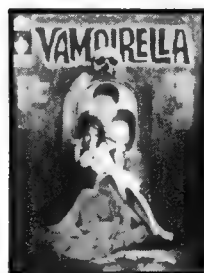
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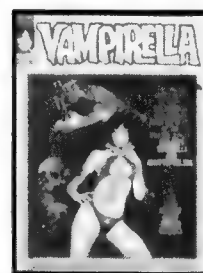
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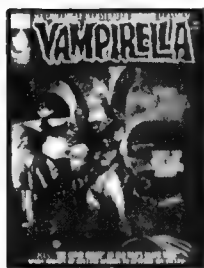
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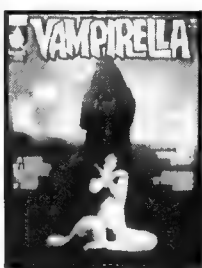
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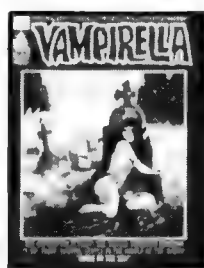
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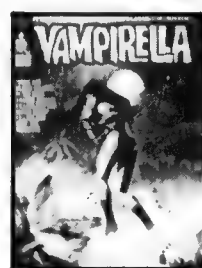
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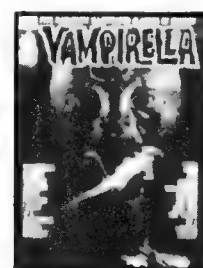
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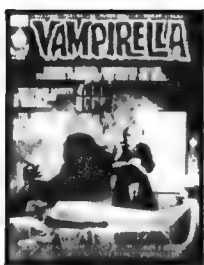
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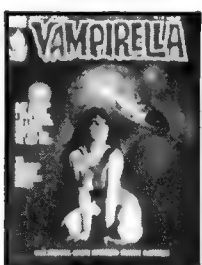
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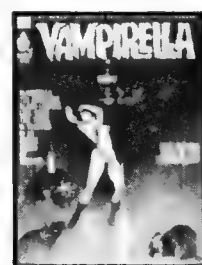
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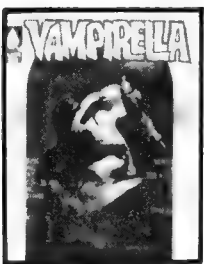
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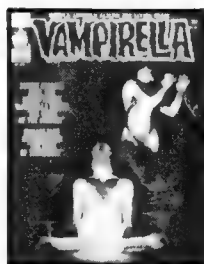
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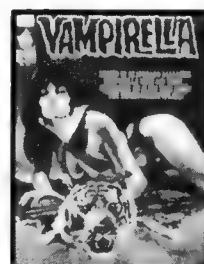
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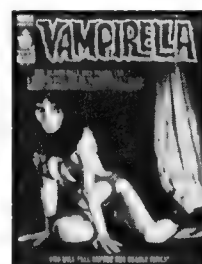
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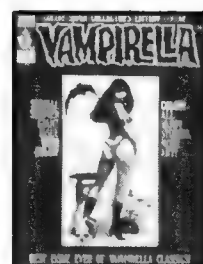
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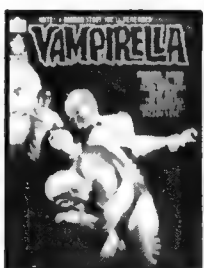
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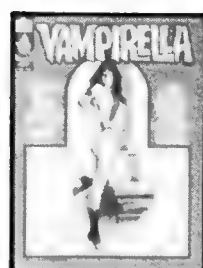
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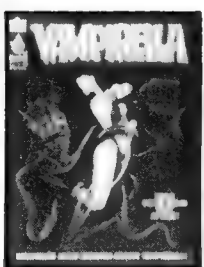
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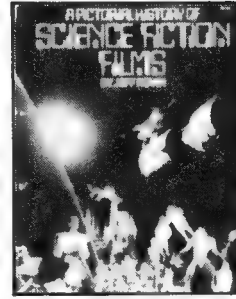
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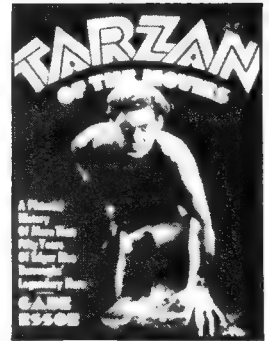
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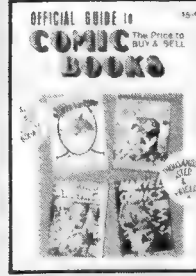
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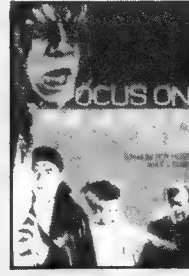
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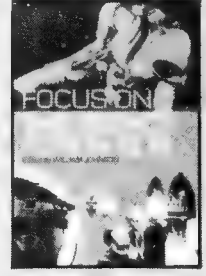
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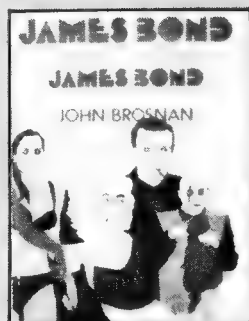
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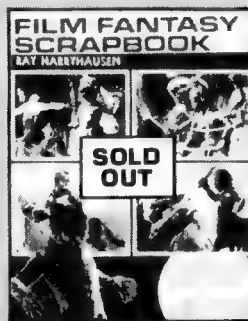
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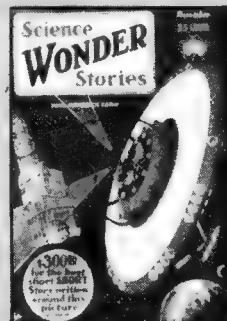
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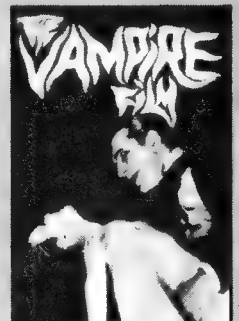
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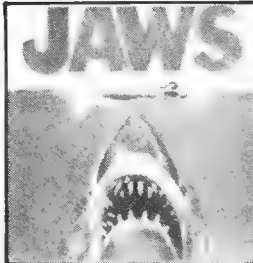
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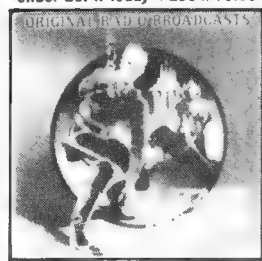
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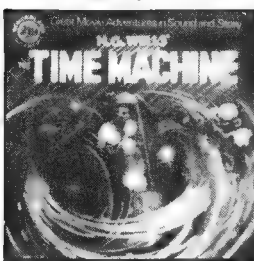
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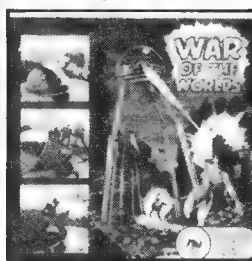
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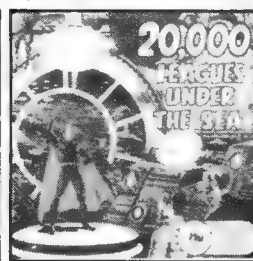
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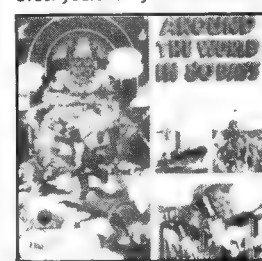
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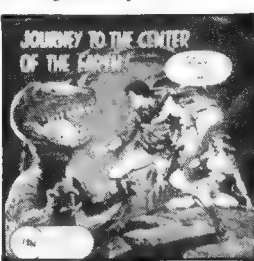
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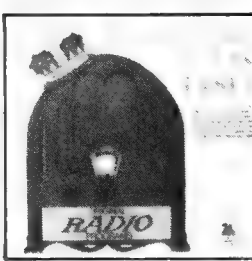
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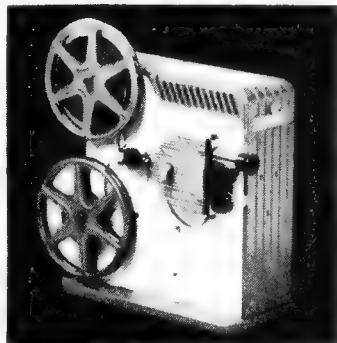
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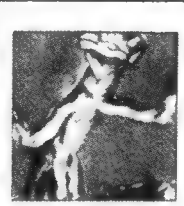
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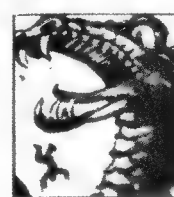
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VAMPIRELLA HOBBY KIT

16-SNAP PLASTIC PARTS

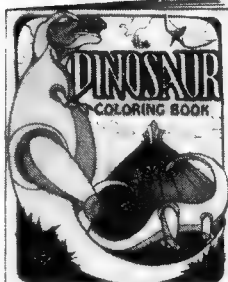
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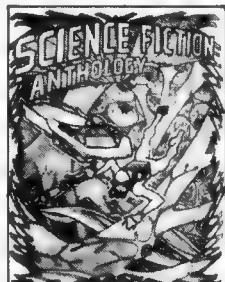
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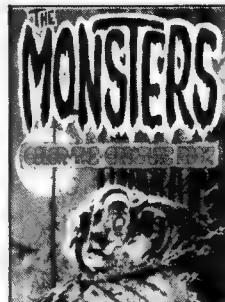
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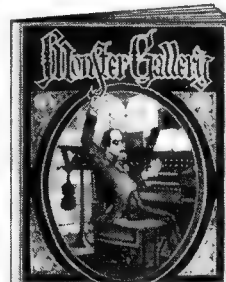
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COMIC
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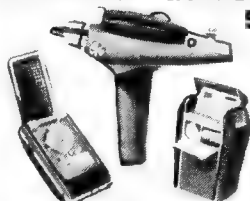
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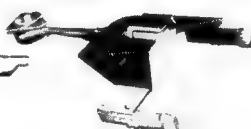
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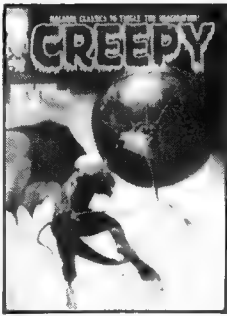
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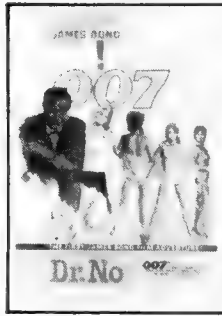
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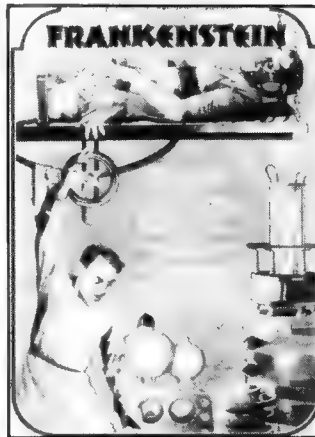
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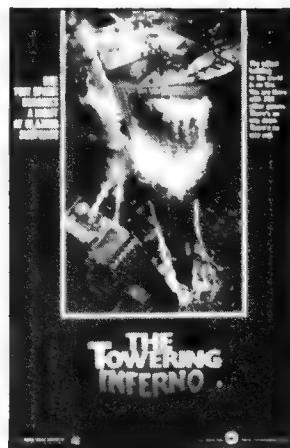
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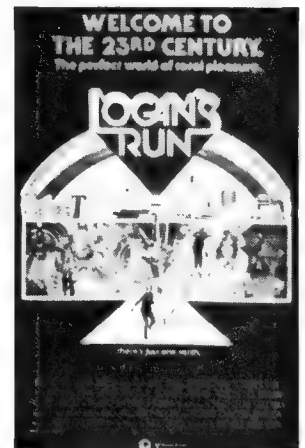
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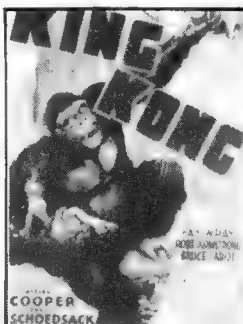
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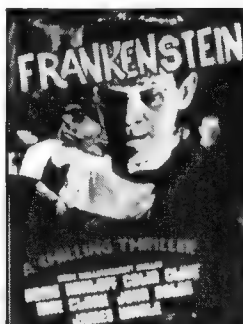
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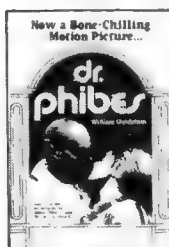
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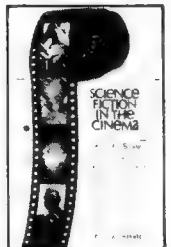
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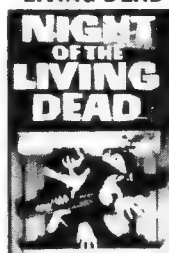
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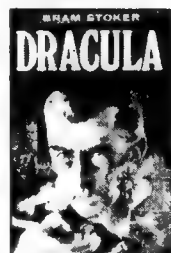
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FRANKENSTEIN



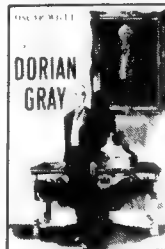
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PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY



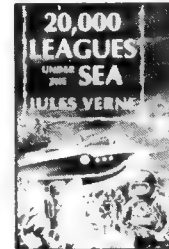
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DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE



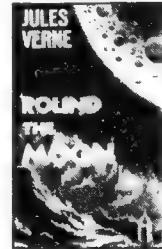
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H.G. Wells' incredible vision of the future evolution of mankind when two different races of people existed on the same world. #2120 TIME MACHINE 95c

INVISIBLE MAN



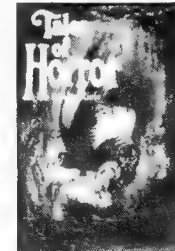
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A story so real it caused a nationwide panic when broadcast over the radio by Orson Welles! One of H.G. Wells' greatest! #2105 WAR OF THE WORLDS 95c

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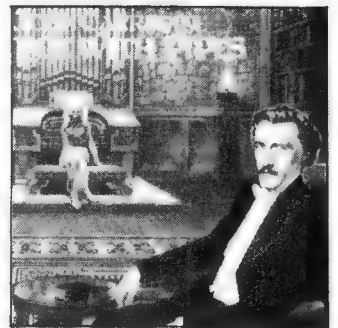
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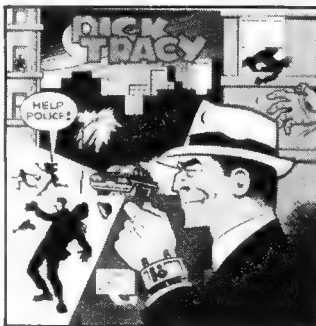
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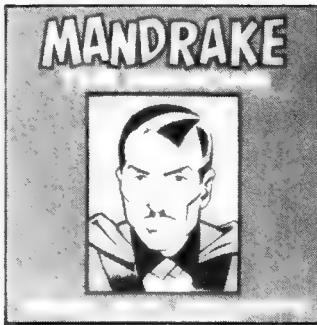
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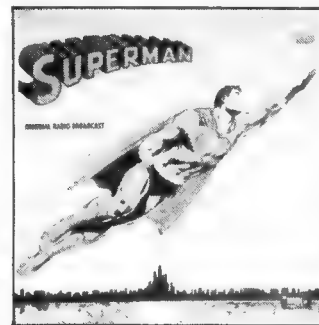
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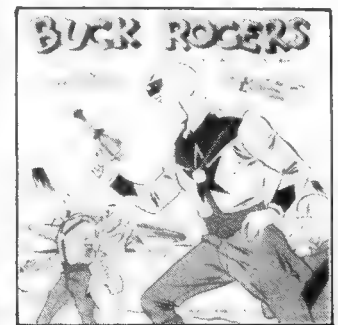
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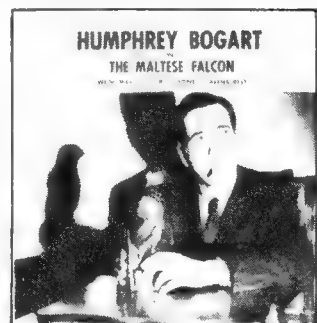
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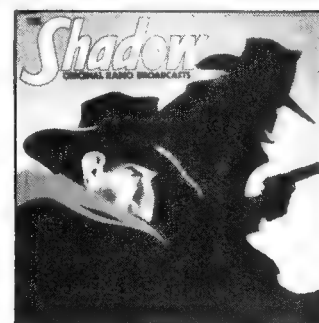
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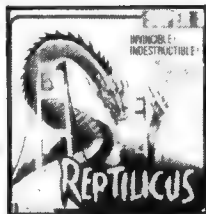
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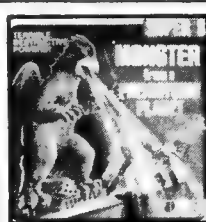
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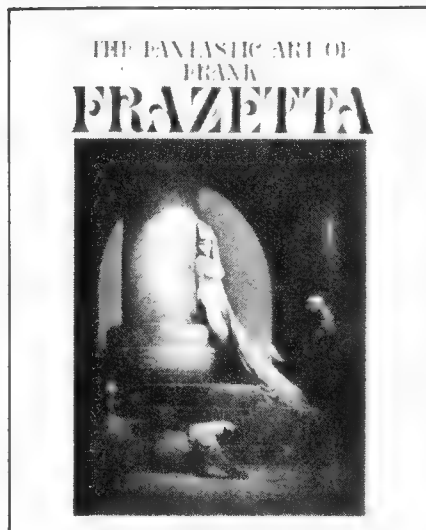
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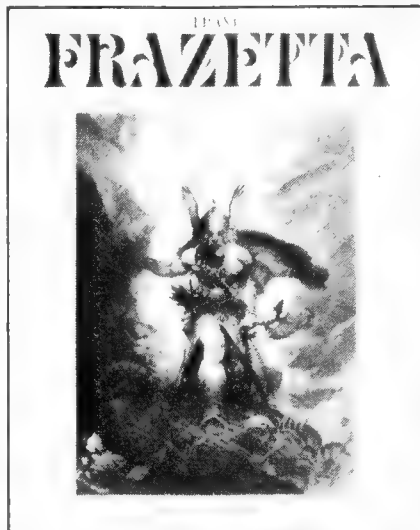


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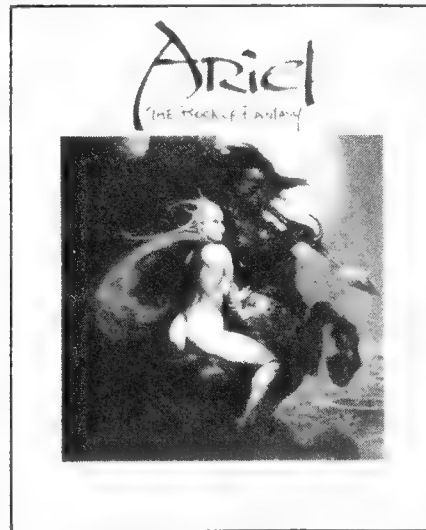
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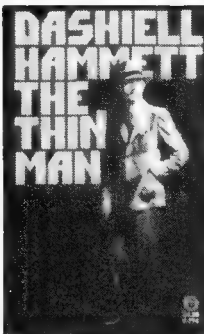
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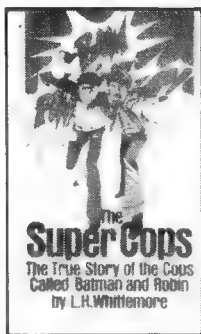
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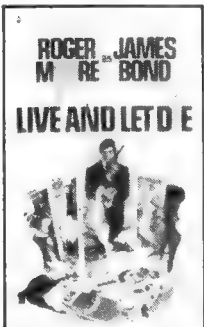
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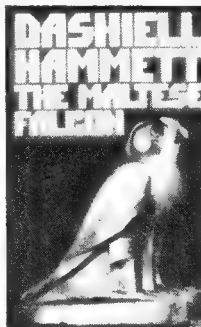
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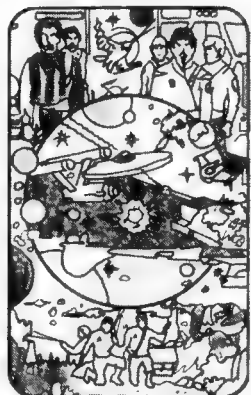
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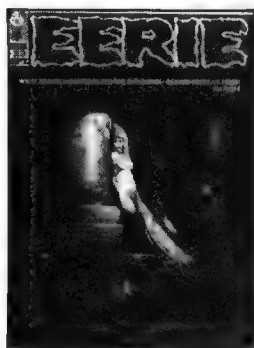


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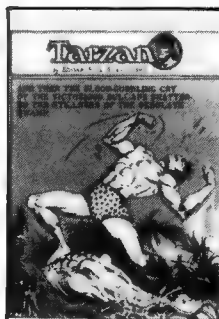
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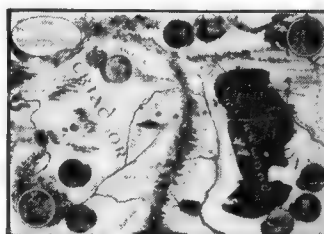


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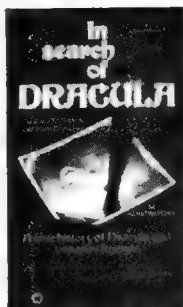


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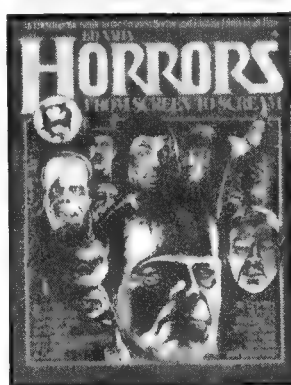
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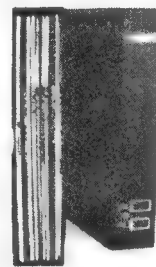
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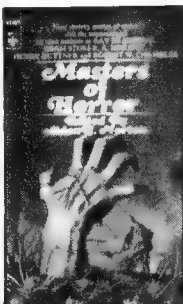
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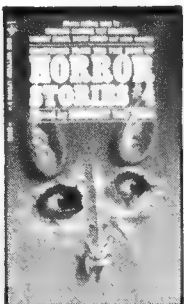
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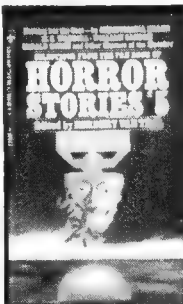
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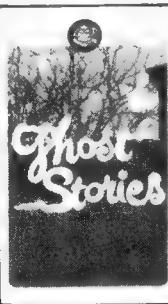
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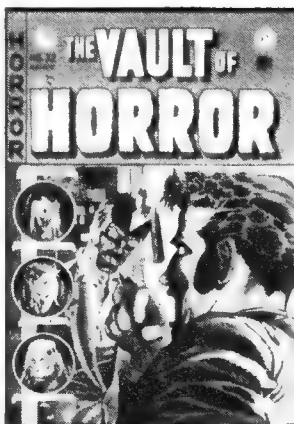
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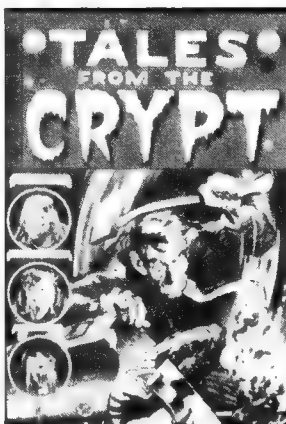
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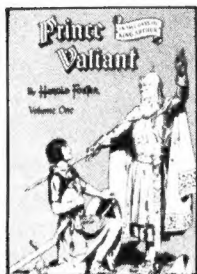


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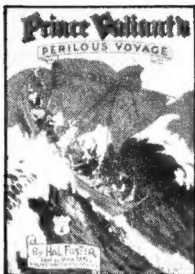
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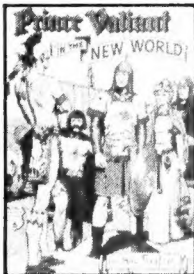
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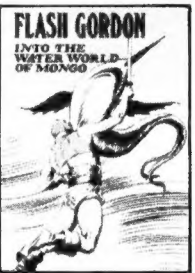
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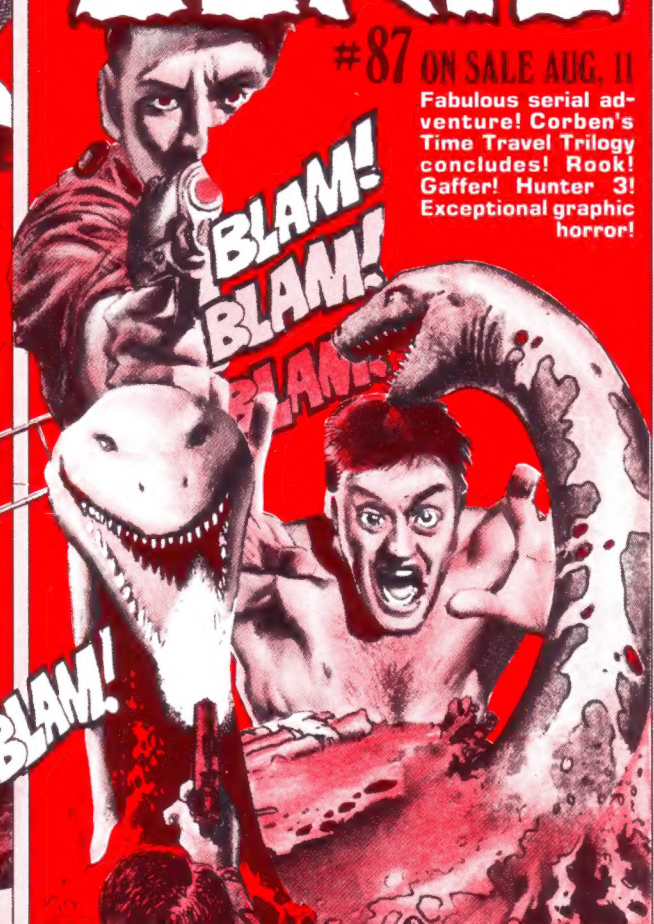


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